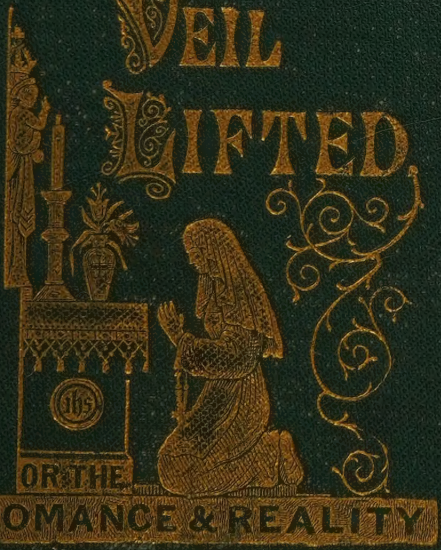
The Veil Lifted



OR THE ROMANCE & REALITY OF CONVENT LIFE

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THE CONVENT CHAPEL.

Page 49.

THE VEIL LIFTED:

OR,

THE ROMANCE AND REALITY OF CONVENT LIFE.

BY

ELIZA RICHARDSON,

AUTHOR OF

"PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM,"

ETC.

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PREFACE.

In bringing the following pages before the public, a few words may be allowed explanatory of the motives which have actuated me in penning them.

Amongst the many valuable works which from time to time have been issued on the subject of conventualism, none, so far as I am aware, have appeared portraying in a familiar form the workings of the system upon individual mind and character, from the earliest stages of the delusion down to its consummation.

That such a work may not be without beneficial influence, I have good reasons for believing. The continually increasing tendency to the conventual form of fanaticism, is a subject for deep regret and sorrowful concern.

1771

The visionary ideas and misdirected enthusiasm in which it originates, are too patent to all dispassionate minds to require comment. The fact, however, is as sad as it is incontrovertible, that the victims themselves are not in the remotest degree aware how absolutely they are the sport of imagination, how many unsuspected elements conspire to make them so, and least of all, of the terrible realities awaiting those who immure themselves in convents. The truth, therefore, cannot be too minutely and forcibly depicted, nor too faithfully brought home to them.

With especial reference to such I have written. Too painfully am I acquainted with their peculiar need; and this acquaintance induces me to believe that it can be met by none so adequately as by those who, like myself, have made experience of monastic life.

Though feeling conscious that my little work is an insignificant contribution to their weal, I nevertheless cherish the hope that some, who would be uninterested by more elaborate descriptions of conventualism as it really is, and equally unmoved

by personal narratives, which they are too apt to regard as the testimony of apostates, may, by this unpretending appeal to their internal consciousness, be led to reflection, and ultimately saved.

That many will be at no loss to recognize their own identity in the earliest phase of my delineations, I have little doubt; that they may never have reason to do so in the final and sorrowful ones, I fervently implore. Need I say, that my material has not been furnished from the storehouse of imagination merely? Much has been derived from direct personal experience, and more supplied by facts collected from various authentic sources. Indeed, that truth, *literal* and *ever recurring*, forms the basis of the entire work, I have no hesitation in positively affirming.

Nor is it too highly coloured. The history of many a poor *réligieuse*, hopelessly incarcerated in a convent of strict seclusion, could it be given to the world, would be found to be written in tears, and sealed with her life-blood.

Did any doubt rest on the subject, the highest authority, that of the Romish Church itself, in its

accredited annals, would furnish abundant confirmation to any mind candid enough to separate *simple facts* from the *false* and *meretricious gloss* with which they are invested. It is therefore only doing myself bare justice to say, that I have dealt with my subject as *sincerely* as *temperately*, rather under-estimating than exaggerating what may seem its darkest features. My aim has been simply to supply a faithful mirror, in which the dear inexperienced dreamer, and the sincere but mistaken enthusiast, may alike see herself reflected, and be timely warned, lest the reflection should be stamped with the seal of perpetuity.

To Him who alone can give it efficacy, I commend the humble effort.

CANONBURY,
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THE VEIL LIFTED.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROFESSION.

It is the month of May: the month specially dedicated in the Roman Catholic Church to the worship of the Blessed Virgin, and therefore called "the month of Mary."

The *réligieuses* of the Convent of St. Clare, at R——, in N——, have been more than ordinarily engaged from an early hour on the morning of the 26th. A "profession" of somewhat unusual interest is expected to take place there to-day.

A young lady, rich in this world's wealth, high in station, beautiful and accomplished, is about to renounce all to become the bride of Christ, in the poor and self-denying sisterhood of St. Clare. A large concourse of spectators is expected to be

present, the privilege of admission having been granted by tickets to a sufficient number to fill the chapel of the convent, itself a Gothic edifice of no mean proportions.

It is not my intention, however, to describe the ceremony. That has been done so often, that it would be treading on ground quite familiar to most readers. Suffice it to say, that it is to be marked by all the pomp and glittering pageantry which the Church of Rome has ever at command, and all those dangerous appeals to the senses which she knows so well how to direct and organize, and which are so mighty an instrument of her power and influence. The best testimony that nothing of the usual effectiveness has been lacking on the occasion will be supplied by the following letter, written by a young lady on her return home, to a friend who had been unable to be present at the sensuous spectacle. She belonged to a nominally Protestant family; but with that criminal rashness which characterizes so many calling themselves Protestants, who are nevertheless well intentioned, had been permitted to gratify her idle curiosity on an occasion which must ever possess a certain amount of attraction, not unaccompanied with risk, to an ardent and imaginative temperament, where knowledge, experience, and fixed Christian

principles are wanting to counterbalance the danger:—

"The ceremony exceeded everything I ever witnessed for grandeur. I cannot attempt to enter into details, but it was gorgeous, magnificent. I remember chiefly the image of the blessed Virgin, clothed in flowing robes of purest white, interspersed with gleaming jewels, and crowned with a regal diadem, illustrative, as I was told, of her queenly dignity.

"The altar, with its massive gold adornments and wreaths of exotic flowers, was in exquisite taste; and the soft light and shadow, so harmoniously blended, made the beauty on every side appear almost like enchantment. Clouds of fragrant incense rose even to the vaulted roof, and filled the air.

"The music, both vocal and instrumental, must have been heard to be appreciated. It was sublime, ravishing, completely bearing the soul away from earth. But what impressed me most of all was the calm, sweet countenances of the nuns, several of which I could clearly discern, as they were ranged in the gallery on my right. The very peace of heaven seemed to rest upon them. I could hardly help envying their possessors. Many amongst them looked beautiful, too, even deprived

as they are of all advantages of costume—nay, attired in that which is ugly and unbecoming.

"But the crowning attraction was Alice, my dear old schoolfellow. Oh, Mary, it was something to melt, to convince. So young! with her commanding beauty! To see wealth, station, all that the world has to offer, renounced—laid down for ever at the feet of Jesus; herself become his bride, and, like Him while on earth, poor, despised, and self-sacrificing; henceforth only subject to the will of those appointed by Him to rule over her. I shall never forget it. God grant that it may make the right impression!"

God grant it may—the *only* right and real one—dear enthusiastic, inexperienced girl! so fit a subject to be ensnared by the devices of the siren enchantress. But how can we pray "deliver us from evil," if we ourselves "enter into temptation"?

In such a scene, and by such means, has many an ardent, guileless spirit received the first germ of fatal, soul-destroying error; the first impulse to that rash and misguided course, which has resulted in the wilful and persistent forging of those unnatural fetters, which the friendly hand of death—is it always in such a case friendly?—can alone dissolve.

So much for outside show. Now, let us take

a glance behind the scenes—a look at realities, at the inner life and heart experience of those whose external seeming has so impressed the impressible imagination of the young enthusiastic beholder. We will visit two or three departments of this abode of "consecrated peace" in the after part of this festival day; venture a forbidden look at some of the occupations of the enviable votaries; and analyze their reflections as they lay their heads on their pillows, at that time which is the best revealer of the secrets of the heart—night, with its solitude.

"'Tis over; and her lovely cheek is now
On her hard pillow—there, alas! to be
Nightly, through many and many a dreary hour,
Wan, often wet with tears, and (ere at length
Her place is empty, and another comes)
In anguish, in the ghastliness of death;
Hers never more to leave these mournful walls,
Even on her bier." ROGERS.

CHAPTER II.

THE POSTULANT.

The ceremony is over. The poor young devotee having put off her bridal robes and assumed those of a novice, has pronounced the vows which *practically* seal her destiny. She has received the congratulations of the sisterhood, and is fairly installed in her new sphere. Take we then leave of her (for our purpose is not to pursue her history further), and proceed to investigate the interior of this vestibule of heaven.

On the ground-floor of the building, somewhat removed from that part of the convent devoted to the *réligieuses*, is an apartment of moderate size, towards which, soon after the mid-day meal, a young lady, a postulant in the institution, directs her steps. She enters it, and seating herself, appears to be waiting for some one. The novice-mistress has desired her to proceed thither, promising quickly to join her.

There is an expression of thoughtfulness on

the young lady's countenance not to be mistaken, as though she were revolving in her mind some question of importance. She does not remain long alone, however, for a light footstep is heard in the passage, and the entrance of the novice-mistress interrupts her reverie, whatever its character. The young lady rises as the mistress enters, and remains standing until she is desired to be seated.

"Well, Emmeline," commences the representative of conventual rule, fixing an inquiring gaze upon the girl, "have your feelings been any more reasonable since we last talked together?"

The cast-down countenance and deprecating manner do not appear very promising, as she timidly replies, "I am sorry to say, No, sister."

"I regret to hear it, my child, for your own sake. I had hoped that our late conversation had shown you the folly of yielding to such earthly thoughts. As long as you do so, you will never be resolute, never at one stay."

"But how can I help it?" replied Emmeline, with quivering lip. "How can I leave my poor mamma for ever, and not feel it?"

"As I before said, to a certain extent this is quite natural, and even allowable; but when it goes so far as to interfere with your duty to God, then it becomes injurious and sinful. You believe

you have received a call to the religious life, do you not?"

"Yes."

"You came here desiring to follow that vocation?"

"Yes," again faltered the girl.

"And you were not ignorant that in order to do so you must forsake the world, and sever every earthly tie?"

"I had *thought* of all this, certainly; but I did not know how very hard it was until I tried to put it in practice."

"It is not leaving *the world* you feel so difficult?" pursued the novice-mistress, inquiringly.

"Oh, no, no; that is comparatively nothing. It is my mother; my mother!"

"'He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me,'" replied the lady, solemnly.

Her listener covered her face with both her hands, but did not speak.

"Those are the words of our blessed Saviour, Emmeline: do you believe them?"

Still no answer, but a smothered sob.

"He never spoke any words in vain. And if you persevere in this forbidden course, clinging to your earthly parent when He has called to his

service, you may prove, too late, that He has settled the question of your unworthiness, by withdrawing the high and holy vocation He now so mercifully vouchsafes."

Emmeline trembled, and strove in vain to speak for some moments. At length she said, with a burst of emotion she could no longer repress, "But my mother is so sick, and I am her only child. If she were but well, and had another daughter to care for her, the trial would be comparatively light."

"God knew all that when He called you to his service. He knows it still, and yet He continues calling you," answered her auditor, composedly. "I grant it is a trial to flesh and blood to leave your mother thus; but the choice rests between her and God; and He is saying to you, 'Choose *this day* whom you would rather serve.'* The decision must be made."

"Oh, what shall I, what shall I do?" exclaimed the poor young creature in tones of anguish. "God give me strength!"

"He will, my child, if you cry to Him," said the mistress, soothingly. "He sees your conflict, and pities you; but He sees also the reward; and

* Throughout the work, Scripture quotations made by Catholics, are from the Douay version.

what comparison can your present difficulty bear to that? For the sacrifice you make in forsaking your earthly parent, He elects you to the high dignity of becoming the spouse of his Son. Think of such a destiny! the bride of Christ, pledged with his own ring, sealed with his own signet!" As the lady spoke, she involuntarily touched the ring she wore.

The young lady raised her head, and made a strong effort to check the torrent of her emotion.

"Dear sister, I feel all that you say. I have dwelt upon it many times in imagination; but if you knew how my poor mother reproached me before I left home, you would not wonder. Again and again she told me that I caused her to die daily. Since then, as you know, every letter has been to the same effect. She is afflicted, a widow, and childless, if I leave her. And sometimes I cannot help asking myself, Can it be right for me to do so? *May* I not be mistaken in supposing I have received a call from God?"

The novice-mistress was silent for a moment. Her countenance had a strange blending of gravity and pity. At length she said—

"Is it any wonder that the grand adversary who tempted our blessed Lord Himself should also tempt the lambs of the flock, especially so very weak

an one as my poor Emmeline? Has He who gave you a conviction so clear as to his will concerning you, as to induce you to break away from home and come here, been then misleading you all this time? Is it not dishonouring Him to indulge such a supposition for a moment? No, no; it is the voice of the devil, who would again entangle you in the snares of the world, from which he sees you are about to escape. Nature is nature; and feel the separation you must and will; but remember, the greater the sacrifice you make in obeying the commands of God, the more worthy will be the offering you present Him, and the greater the value He will set upon it. He foresaw this contest with the flesh in his elect spouses when He said, He came 'to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother,' and that 'a man's enemies shall be they of his own household.'"

Emmeline's tears still flowed at intervals, but they were gentler tears. The words of the novice-mistress were evidently not without their influence.

"Be brave, my dear child," she continued; "act generously towards your heavenly Bridegroom, and high shall be the place you will gain in his esteem. Listen to his own gracious words,

'Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people, and thy father's house, and the king shall greatly desire thy beauty.' "

A silence of some minutes ensued. The novice-mistress was watching the effect of her words; while the girl was buried in thought, which was not yet untroubled. At length she exclaimed, with a heavy sigh, "Oh that I had your courage, sister; but I am so very, very weak."

"So we all are by nature. We can only gain strength by earnestly asking for it where it is to be found. Be very devout to the Blessed Virgin. She is the 'mother of sorrows,' and can feel for you; but she is the mother of holy courage too. Think what she endured when she resigned her Son to the cruel death of the cross; and how steadfastly she suffered all for our salvation. Go to her often, and invoke her with great confidence; she will inspire you with resolution, and never fail to assist you in every moment of weakness and temptation."

Emmeline smiled a faint smile. In a deferential voice she said—

"May I ask you one question, sister?"

"Certainly, at such a time as this."

The manner as well as words, however, clearly intimated that the present was a time of privilege,

and due reserve in the questioning department would have to be observed in future intercourse.

"Did it cost you much to leave your friends when you embraced the religious life? Did you—did you feel as I do?"

Now the novice-mistress was not naturally an unfeeling woman. If her sensibilities were not as exquisitely attuned as those of the young girl before her, she had known the feelings common to our nature, and remembered that she too had once owned human ties. It is true that fanaticism had done its best to crush out the one and extinguish the memory of the other, with an appearance of success she sometimes believed to be real; and at the present moment, stimulated by this belief, she was urging the inexperienced victim before her to tread in the same path of self-crucifixion, sincerely regarding it, as she did, as being the surest highway to heaven.

But the inquiry so simply made by Emmeline struck a chord which caused a strange and unlooked-for vibration down, down, into the very depths of her being. Long buried memories awoke as by the touch of inspiration; and as if in mockery of the robe of stoicism she had woven around herself, and in defiance of the panoply in which she deemed herself to be encased, the half-

moistened eye and quivering lip proclaimed her still to be *woman*.

For several moments she did not speak, and Emmeline began to fear that she had spoken unadvisedly, while the mistress almost dreaded lest the true cause of her silence should be divined. Inwardly blaming herself, however, for yielding even for a moment to such weakness, even while she trembled from its effects, she replied at length, with a singular mixture of severity and softness,—

"No *réligieuse* leaves her friends without suffering. It cost me much at the time, as it must do all who are resolute and whole-hearted in what they undertake: but believing the words of our Divine Lord, which I have quoted to you, 'A man's foes shall be they of his own household,' as explained by blessed Liguori, how could I esteem my relatives in any other light than as he depicts them—viz., 'my worst spiritual enemies'? Thus believing, I threw my heart and soul into the conflict, and determined, in the strength of Christ and of his holy mother, so to lop off every branch of the fatal growth of human love, that not an offshoot should remain. In short, I resolved that as my heavenly Bridegroom deigned to offer me *all*, He should have my poor heart in return. By his grace He enabled me to keep my resolve; the

conflict was brief in proportion to its intensity: the courageous soul God never fails to crown with success."

"Then you think after a while this conflict of feeling will cease, if I pray and struggle against it?" inquired Emmeline.

"Doubtless, in a blessed degree, if you are generous and steadfast in your endeavours. Ever bear in mind the teaching of the holy saint I have just mentioned, that 'the worst spiritual enemies of a *réligieuse* are her relatives.' If, believing this, you act up to your conviction, and determinately resolve, by God's grace, to consider yourself as utterly dead to them henceforth, banishing even their memory as a forbidden thing, perilous to your soul's interests, the struggle will be of short duration; earth and earthly ties will grow more and more valueless in your eyes; and He who has deigned to affiance you to Himself, more and more precious. Be assured that in his love you will find a glorious and abundant recompence for the poor failing human spring you turn from with pious resolve."

"I *have* thought so," responded Emmeline, "and I believe it; yes, I *will* believe it."

"And act accordingly?"

"I will try."

"Then you will not try in vain; and remember, no effort will be unnoted, no sacrifice unrewarded, by your heavenly Spouse. Nay, the greater these are, the greater will be the store of merit you will be laying up for yourself, and the more pleasing you will be in his sight. No cowardly soul ever yet became a saint."

"Thank you, sister Vicaire; I think I shall be better now."

"I shall pray for you to our Lady: and do you rely much on her patronage."

"I will."

The novice-mistress imprinted a kiss on her forehead. The girl knelt, and reverently seizing her hand, returned the endearment.

CHAPTER III.

THE NOVICE.

THE last visitor has departed. The convent has resumed its accustomed quiet, and the *réligieuses* their appointed occupations. Much menial work, of course, there is at all times to be done in an establishment which contains from sixty to seventy nuns, and nearly the same number of young lady boarders. But the event of the morning has somewhat added to this; and the extra requirements demand that the hours of secular service should this day be prolonged a little later than common. There are lay sisters to superintend and assist in the general work of the convent; but it is a principle established in all such institutions freely to employ the novices in every species of toil; and the more repugnant and distasteful any kind of occupation is perceived to be to particular individuals, the more certainly are they chosen to perform it.

In pursuance of this principle, the novice known to have been most delicately nurtured, whose hands, perhaps, have hitherto scarcely come in contact with impurity, may be seen this afternoon diligently washing a large heap of greasy plates and dishes; another engaged in some occupation still more menial; the employment of each having been especially selected with a view to mortifying the natural inclinations.

The unusual number of visitors have left their traces on the floor of the entrance hall, which is more than ordinarily dirt-stained. Kneeling on the stones, with a brush in her hand and a pail of water by her side, is a very young novice. She looks pensive and by no means in vigorous health, while her delicate hands clearly proclaim that such work is quite new to her. As she proceeds to perform what she evidently knows little about, and finds so laborious, she heaves the half-unconscious sigh, and the forbidden tear steals down her cheek. Poor child! In the world she has been a lady, cradled in the lap of luxury, and, until this fatal dream of the bliss of conventual life took possession of her, she never knew the reality of a care or the semblance of a hardship. She is now undergoing the trials of the noviciate; and only because she has been so unaccustomed to work of

such a nature, and has a peculiar aversion to it, is she oftener than any other of her fellow-novices selected to perform it. She tries not to murmur, and prays for grace to submit cheerfully, for she is very sincere, and endeavours to believe all is for her good; but she finds it so repugnant, despite all her endeavours, and it is so great a tax upon her physical strength, that no effort will at all times repress the betrayal of her feelings. Already her lustrous eye has grown less bright, her blooming cheek pale, and her graceful figure has lost its roundness.

Slowly dragging through her task, yet with all the energy she *can* command, she fears reproof for her tardiness. Nor is her fear ill grounded. Before she has much more than half completed it the novice-mistress appears, and chides her for her idleness, imposing as a penance the repetition of the same duty until she learns to accomplish it within a given space of time. No word of explanation or apology escapes the novice; *that* is not allowed. She must hear in silence with downcast eyes, and submit without a murmur.

Before she is able to accomplish the drudgery, however, the bell rings for five o'clock meditation, and for want of punctuality in attending this, penance will be again incurred. With a trembling

hand and palpitating heart, she more hastily than thoroughly puts the finishing stroke to her task, and arrives in the chapel some minutes after the devotion has commenced; for which breach of rule she is, in due course, severely reprimanded and penance is inflicted.

This is a fair specimen of the trials of her daily life. Alas! it is but the beginning of sorrows.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SUNNY SIDE OF THE NOVICIATE.

The five o'clock meditation completed, we will proceed to the noviciate. This is a plain room of average proportions, boasting no attempt at adornment on its coloured walls but an image of the blessed Virgin, by no means remarkable for its comeliness of face or form. Within this apartment, seated on either side of the deal table running down its centre, are some half-dozen nuns wearing the white veil of the order, and four other young ladies, whose secular attire proclaims that, though aspirants for this distinction, they have not yet attained to it. At the head of the table is seated the novice-mistress. On her knees, at the side of this lady, is a young girl with a book in her hand, apparently engaged in reading from it to the mistress. Perfect silence reigns while this is going forward. As soon as the lesson is

concluded, the novice-mistress rises and quits the room.

Her departure is a signal for talking. This is a privilege conceded to-day on account of the "profession" which has taken place, with the understanding, however, that the conversation will only be upon permitted topics. As before stated, it is the month of May, the season specially set apart for the worship of the blessed Virgin. At this time, of course, her image is an object of peculiar veneration, and its adornment a subject of more importance than at any other.

In the noviciate the weighty matter has now to be discussed and settled as to which peculiar dress out of her rich wardrobe the image before alluded to shall be attired in for the morrow, she being the especial favourite and particular care of the novices.

The box containing the said wardrobe is brought out, the articles turned over one by one, their merits discussed, and the likes and dislikes of the individuals present freely canvassed; all, with one exception, seeming to take a lively interest in the discussion. This is the postulant, whose acquaintance we have already made. She does not speak, but with downcast face steadily proceeds with her work, which is that of making scapulars with scarlet cloth.

Presently the somewhat coarse and uninteresting-looking doll is taken down from its pedestal, and subjected to the process of kissing by several, indeed by most of those present. She is then disrobed, and, after the animated discussion aforesaid, is attired in a dress of blue satin, with minor adornments to correspond; at least supposed to do so.

"Now, Hugoline, how *can* you say you prefer that to white?" exclaimed a dreamy-looking novice with a yawn.

"It suits the holy Virgin's complexion better," replied the other, making a reverence to the image which she was surveying.

"Nay, Hugoline, I am sure pink is most suited to the blessed Mother's complexion, if it's that you're considering," exclaimed another novice, whom we shall call Clara.

"I don't think anything is half so becoming as that spangled scarlet with the white lace," said another. "It's exquisite!"

"Excepting the purple and gold stars," vociferated another, who was some little distance from the scene of action.

"Let me see," said Hugoline, who, seemingly the *authorized* dresser, began to feel her taste a little at fault, or rather her power of decision,

amongst so many conflicting opinions, as she again slowly turned over the showy vestments. "Here's a robe that's better than either. It's lovely." She held up to view, as she spoke, a bright rose pink brocade, richly trimmed with silver.

All eyes were raised. They had seen the same thing over and over again, and the wonder was that they *could* find anything exciting in the oft-repeated pastime. But the human mind, however constituted, needs unbending in some shape or other; and theirs being continually denied any healthy and legitimate source of recreation, and perpetually brought down to the narrow circle in which they dwelt, contrived to find it in the puerile and shallow trifles, which, as though in mockery of all that is ennobling and sublime in religion, were thus placed within their reach. Poor, pitiable, deluded creatures! It was a humiliating, saddening sight. These deathless spirits, aspiring after the awful relationship of wedded spouses of the King of heaven and earth, and cheating themselves with the belief that they were the most exalted women in the world because of this relationship, thus playing with a wooden idol, and degraded to the level of the veriest idol-worshippers.

Exclamations of "Sweet!" "Grand!" "Exquisite!" "What a love!" resounded through the

room. In the midst of the unwonted noise the novice-mistress reappeared. Silence, of course, immediately ensued.

Leave to speak in her presence, however, having been asked and obtained by Hugoline, the opinion of the lady was solicited as to the vestment, and condescendingly given. This decided the point; and the protracted operation of dressing at length came to an end, more silently and quickly than had at first seemed probable. No sooner was this concluded than the bell rang for evening prayers. They all rose, and, forming rank, proceeded at once to the chapel, lowly bending before the image as they passed before it to leave the room.

CHAPTER V.

NIGHT'S REVEALINGS—THE ORPHAN.

NIGHT has commenced her reign, and darkness broods over the face of nature. The convent is wrapped in profound stillness, as the inhabitants should be in profound repose, after the fatigues and excitement of the day. Surely, if the pictures drawn for uninitiated eyes be true, the holy *réligieuses* will have sweetly sunk to rest, nothing but pure imaginings, or blessed dreams of their future inheritance in their heavenly Bridegroom's palace-home above, stealing over their calm repose. Is it so? Come with me to the cell of one whose *sweet calmness* had most impressed the youthful spectator.

What a strangely old young face! how stony and rigid. Indeed, the whole figure, in its fixity and stillness, might be the work of the sculptor, for any sign of life evinced, as it reclines in utter

exhaustion on the outside of the paillasse which alone constitutes the humble bed.

There is a hopelessness in the mien which is touchingly expressive and heart-reaching. At length a sigh—such a sigh!—resounds through the narrow cell. The features for an instant work convulsively, and the words "No hope!" issue in deep, hollow tones from the pallid lips.

"None!" her inmost soul replies; and the countenance again relapses into the same fixed aspect of mute despair.

Yet how young she looks, to have "no hope" written on her countenance, engraven on her very heart.

She is young. Six-and-twenty summers have hardly passed over that fair form, yet she has been an inmate of the convent ten years. Home she has none on earth, and her guardian's house she has never visited since she was consigned to the convent school, to be educated and taken care of.

A warm-hearted and innocent orphan, very impressible, and too easily moulded by skilful hands, her young affections twining themselves around any one who would show her kindness, and possessing in a large degree the element of religious veneration, she had been readily and

successfully subjected to the influences surrounding her; and before she was at an age to understand the nature of the step she was taking, before she *could* know anything of her own heart, or was able to comprehend the dreary, joyless, hopeless future which lay before her, she had been inveigled into perpetrating the fearful act which for ever cut her off from all ties of love and kindred, and reduced her for the remainder of existence to the condition of a mere machine, deprived of volition, whose every act and motion must be regulated only according to the will and pleasure of others; nay, worse, her very thoughts laid under interdict, and subject to the scrutiny and arbitration of her spiritual despots. She understood it all *now—felt* it to her spirit's depths—and intensely realized every bitter ingredient in the sorrowful cup she must henceforth drink to the dregs.

Was it any wonder hope should have fled from her bosom, and despair held dread empire in her soul? The conviction, however, had dawned upon her slowly, and by degrees, in different phases, and at first but very partially, only to be resisted as temptation, and confessed to her directors as sin.

Alas! the means employed to remedy the evil only increased it; and at length, amidst paroxysms

of mental agony, the uttermost extent of her misery became fully apprehended. Its wild acuteness had, however, well-nigh expended itself, and was fast giving place to a settled, unvarying gloom. She had witnessed the pageant of to-day in seeming stoicism. Another victim! was the one idea prevalent in her mind. Yet she thought, with a shudder, of *the system*, more than with pity upon *her*.

She had seen many such—had marked the progress of the delusion from the first — had pitied, blamed; unable, by one word or hint of warning, to aid or avert; powerless to convey, even by look, what her whole soul yearned to utter.

She was growing accustomed to such sacrifices, and well nigh in danger of becoming stolidly indifferent to them.

For some time she retains her recumbent posture in silence. At last the words "The grave" escape her lips. For a moment a fierce joy gleams across her countenance, and rising, she paces the confined limits of her cell with rapid steps. "Yes! they cannot cheat me of that. There is rest there —rest for this aching head, this weary, desolate spirit! Be still, poor throbbing heart, peace is coming for thee; yes, *for thee*. We shall lie down

in the quiet grave, and never wake till the resurrection morning. And it won't be long. I know it—feel it. Oh, joy!"

Throwing herself on her knees, she buries her face in her hands, and tries to pray.

"This is not right. Jesus and Mary, help me! I have forgotten the long, long purgatory, which will too surely be my portion for all my unholy thoughts and dark repinings. Then, oh, confession! No good confession for so long! So many bad communions! How *can* I tell all the wild, wild thoughts that will intrude—the evil reasonings in which I indulge continually? How dare I? Joy? Mockery! No hope for me on earth or in heaven!"

A heavy groan escapes her. It is the expression of anguish that cannot find relief in tears. Once more the same harsh rigidity steals over her features. Resting her head on the coverlid as she kneels, exhausted nature claims the repose she needs; and for a brief space she sleeps. It is very brief. Too soon the early bell summons the self-sacrificing sisterhood to the devotions and toils of another day, and the tired pilgrim—not of the world's highway, but of a path the unrelieved monotony and sterile dreariness of which no human pen can depict, or mind conceive, save that

of the sufferer—again awakes to the consuming consciousness of her life-long wretchedness; vainly to sigh and pray, despite the despair regarding the future expressed so lately, for the only release which can arrive for her—the grave.

CHAPTER VI.

THERESA—THE RESULT OF CONVENTUAL EDUCATION.

Turn we to another of these blissful enclosures. Here we meet one almost a child in appearance, in whose countenance, despite the muffling head-gear, some traces of beauty are discernible. Gentleness and candour are combined in its expression, but there is an earnestness in the large dark eye which betrays latent depth of feeling that might otherwise have been unsuspected.

She has not yet attained her twentieth birthday, and three years ago was the pride of the village in which she lived, the joy of her fond parents, and the light of their dwelling. Romanists by birth and education, however, they imagined that no tuition and training was like that imparted in a convent, and under this conviction had schooled their hearts to part with her for two years, in order that she may derive the benefit of

a residence for that length of time in the far-famed conventual establishment at R——, in N——.

She was so tenderly attached to her parents, and felt the parting from home so much, that the possibility of her permanently leaving them never entered into their calculations; if it had, it is questionable whether, Romanists as they were, they would have ventured to encounter the risk. Her love to them had been so absorbing, and her clinging to home so unusual, how *could* they imagine that she would voluntarily condemn herself to lasting separation and perpetual banishment?—that she would resolve, of her own free will, never to cross the threshold of her home again—never even to take a last farewell of scenes and associations which had been endeared to her from childhood—of friends and connections to whom she was bound by, as it seemed, indissoluble ties of affection and interest? Yet so it was. From the morning she left her home, then a girl of seventeen, her light footfall had never again been heard within its hallowed precincts; her bright and joyous glance had never again gladdened her parents' hearts, nor her voice of love fallen like music on their ears.

Sincere Romanists, they yet knew nothing of

convent life. They had no *experimental* acquaintance with the influences to which they were subjecting their child. Nor did they understand the strength of the religious element in her character, or think how often, under her light and careless exterior, deep thoughts and earnest feelings regarding her soul's salvation had been her frequent visitants. And if they had comprehended all this—if they had estimated it to the full—they still would have been unprepared for the result—for the sad knowledge that these precious links in the chain of God's love could be seized by the hand of subtlety and design, and converted into a fetter, which must prove a galling bond of misery, encircling her while life remained.

Inexperienced, simple-hearted, and sincere, she had fallen too easy a prey to the snares set to entangle her feet. Trusting implicitly in her spiritual guides, she had confided to them every sacred feeling, and every fervent aspiration of her youthful heart. And faithfully had they responded to the trust. Each exaggerated picture her imagination drew of conventual life had been pronounced genuine and truthful, and her more ardent impressions fostered and strengthened, until they assumed the character of convictions from which there was no appeal; while all the graver and

more earnest elements of her nature had been so well apprehended and so skilfully tampered with, that they took unnatural proportions, resulting in religious fanaticism of the most fatal and dangerous kind.

Cautiously, and by degrees, had the state of her mind been made known to her parents. At first they treated the matter lightly, regarding it only as proof of a too impressible temperament, which time and a little more experience would correct. As it began to wear a more serious aspect, they remonstrated and reasoned; all in vain. They requested her return home, at least for a time, that she might there test the reality of her sentiments. Persuaded, however, that by voluntarily placing herself in the way of temptation she might forfeit her vocation, she refused to comply.

They came to see her at the convent, and endeavoured to place the matter before her in every possible light; but though she struggled with her feelings, weeping bitterly, and at the last interview clinging so convulsively to her mother's neck that it was difficult to separate them, her *will* was unchanged. The belief that God required the sacrifice, and that her salvation demanded it, had become so indelibly impressed upon her mind

that no human pangs could weaken her resolution. She must, at whatever cost, escape the dangers of the world, and ensure heaven; and how insignificant all she *could* suffer here to do that!

Her parents were too good Catholics to dare to combat so holy a resolve beyond a certain point, however much nature felt it. So, with bereaved hearts, they returned to their desolate home, struggling to submit to the decree, bitter as they felt it to be. But from that hour the mother drooped palpably; and after twelve months of slow decline, intelligence had this morning been received by her daughter that she was given over by the physicians, and in a few days, it may be hours, must pass away from earth. Poor Theresa felt this with all the intensity of which her nature was capable. No sternest effort, penance, or mortification, had ever been able to blunt her feelings of tender affection for her parents, or cause her entirely to forget home and its associations.

Though so long and systematically denied any legitimate manifestation, her love had burned, a hidden fire upon the altar of her heart; and many a severe internal conflict had been sustained in the endeavour to conquer what she esteemed her too earthly emotions.

She had received the intimation of her mother's

approaching end with an apparent calmness which may well have deceived a casual observer. But what she actually *had* suffered during the ceremony of the day only the Great Reader of hearts could know. Gazing upon the pomp and glitter around her with an apparently attentive eye, in reality she saw nought of it. Her thoughts were far away in her dear old home; her gaze fixed, how intently! upon her dying mother.

She had longed for night that she might be alone, to give vent to her feelings in tears and prayer. But now it had come, she was unable to do either. Tears refused to come at her bidding. She had tried to pray, but words died upon her tongue. She had none to express the agonizingly incongruous emotions which oppressed and overwhelmed her. Unnaturally excited, she stood before the grated window of her little cell, her large eyes gleaming with a strange fire.

As in a panoramic view, rapid but clear, the scenes of her childhood passed before her: the haunts where she had loved to roam in the bright summer time; the stream by which she had wandered hand in hand with some loved one; the garden in which she had culled the choicest flowers and plucked the ripest fruit; her happy home, rich with every innocent indulgence which parental

kindness could devise, or affectionate ingenuity suggest; and blending with all, and eclipsing all, the revered presence of her father and the beloved image of her mother.

Her swelling heart overleaped time, circumstance, and possibility. "I must go to them! I will! *She* is dying!"

In her futile misery she shook the iron grating of the window as though she would dislodge it.

"Mother! Oh, my mother! I never dreamt of this. And it is my act, my deed, my own deliberate deed!"

No soothing voice whispered one faintest accent of hope or comfort.

"*You* warned me, counselled, entreated me. You were right, and I was wrong. I see it all *now*. I thought I saw everything *then;* yes! everything but *this*."

She turned frantically towards the door. "Perhaps even now she is calling me; longing to see her child once more ere she departs. I *must* look upon her loved face and say farewell, before she is laid in the cold grave for ever. Nothing shall keep me from her. I will dare them—tell them all."

Her hand was on the latch, ready to second the wild resolve; but her vow, that fatal vow,

which had *for ever* made her a prisoner within those walls, and severed her from each tie of kindred and affection, rose startingly before her mental vision. She shrank back, cowering and horror-stricken, in silent despair.

And who shall describe the wild storm of heart-rending anguish with which she struggled, as the conviction *of her true condition* forced itself upon her *for the first time;* or conceive the rayless, hopeless gloom which henceforth and for ever fastened upon that girl's young spirit? She was a dupe, a slave, a captive! A captive beneath a yoke more despotic than was ever before forged by man's utmost ingenuity for his fellow-man, because it fetters the affections and tramples upon the holiest, most divinely constituted ties of our social being.

How her yearning heart, strained to agony, pictured her sorrowing father in his lonely home, wifeless and childless; while she vainly longed to take her heaven-appointed place as his comforter and solace! Then, in accents clear and upbraiding, assuming fresh meaning, and penetrating with strange force to her spirit's depths, rang out the divine command, learned in childhood, which even her corrupt church has not dared to mutilate or destroy *publicly*—"Honour thy father and thy

mother, that thou mayest be long-lived upon the land which the Lord thy God will give thee." *

At length, thanks to mercy not of earth, tears are granted to save the surcharged heart from breaking, the over-wrought mind from losing its equilibrium. Throughout the remainder of that dreary night, on her knees she weeps in bitterness of spirit.

Alas! however, her harsh creed has taught her not the *sure refuge* of a child of God in even such an hour as this. She knows no *direct* access to the compassionate heart of Him "who knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust;" to the sympathy of that precious Saviour "who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

If aught like prayer escapes her, it is in the shape of an invocation to the Virgin or some saint; and if anything for a moment checks the hurricane of emotion, it is in the guise of fear for the account to be rendered of these sinful human feelings to her tyrants. So in unmitigated wretchedness she weeps the night away. What of the morrow?

* It is remarkable, however, that St. Benedict, in his "Rule," which is looked upon as the model for all monastic rules, recites all the Decalogue except the fifth commandment, and for it he substitutes the words, "Honour all men." (See "Nuns and Nunneries," p. 95.)

CHAPTER VII.

THE YOUTHFUL CONVERT.

THERE is another young head bowed in agony in one of those convent cells. She is a convert, and has been a novice in the institution about a year and six months. Oh, how enthusiastic she was when she first breathed that hallowed air! Surely the ground on which she trod was neither more nor less than holy. Very young and inexperienced, possessed withal of an imagination which clothed everything it touched in its own gorgeous and illusive colours, she had no sooner become a pervert to Romanism than she was at first sight entangled by the glittering snare of conventual life. Very earnest about her soul's salvation, and fearful of the attractions of a world which she felt possessed too much fascination for her, she turned to the conventual cheat with eager, longing eyes. Dreams of the paradise it offered haunted her continually, and highly wrought pictures of the

blessed peace and *security* it promised, filled her chambers of imagery.

In exchange for the ties of earth which she must sever, love, bearing a hue celestial, should flow into her soul. For the distractions and temptations surrounding her, should be substituted undisturbed calm and holy contemplation. Surely it was the life of heaven begun below, to terminate at length only at the gate of heaven itself.

Contemplated afar off, from the midst of the scene of earthly comfort by which she was surrounded, and the atmosphere of human love in which she dwelt, very insignificant appeared all the sacrifices which would be required of her: all unconscious that the very exuberance of her present happiness diffused an illusive halo around the future, she reposed on a bed of roses, and indulged her fantastic day-dream. Dear young visionary! Who dare blame such *pure* enthusiasm at nineteen? or who, sharing the common sympathies of humanity, to say nothing of those of Christianity, would award to it such appalling retribution?

The illusion grew and strengthened, and speedily assumed the force of conviction, under the fostering care of those who, having an eye on her wealth —for she was very rich—did not design that it

should be dissipated. In compliance with the counsel given her, she had left her home under a false pretext, all she had solicited being permission to make "a retreat" of a few days in the convent at R——. This had been unwillingly accorded by her fond but sorrowing parents, who, reluctant as they felt to her becoming even a temporary inmate of such a place, were fearful of increasing the evil they deplored by too strenuous an opposition to her wishes. Her ultimate intentions she had carefully concealed, only informing them when the step was beyond recal.

At an early date, she had begun to reap the fruit of the seed which she had sown. From the bounty and comfort of an affluent home, she had come, late in the autumn, to test the realities of the life she had chosen. The month of postulancy expired, which the dying beams of summer had gilded with a little sunshine, and rendered more tolerable; her entry on the noviciate launched her amidst all the rigours of a conventual winter. Hitherto so surrounded had she been by luxury and indulgence, that no want had been unsatisfied, even temporarily; and so carefully had the inclemency of the season been guarded against, that her slender frame had scarcely known the change by any inconvenience experienced therefrom. Now,

however, permitted no additional covering but the habit of the order, which was worn alike in summer and winter; forbidden to approach even the small portion of fire permitted in the convent; exposed to every species of discomfort, with unwonted demands on her unaccustomed powers;—her sense of suffering was often keen in the extreme; and though she repressed its manifestation as a sin, not daring to admit even to herself the feelings of fear and disappointment which would ever and anon intrude, the physical effects were ere long painfully apparent. The elasticity of her step vanished, the fine colour faded from her cheek, and the fire from her eye. A chilling weight oppressed her, none the less painful that she had not courage stedfastly to examine it and ascertain its cause.

As the weary months rolled on, and her bodily sufferings increased, so did her spirits more evidently droop. Was this the Eden which she had pictured in her rosy dreams? Could this be the goodly land she had pined for from her pillow of down? And what was there mentally and spiritually to compensate for the physical privations? They had told her of love, and her imagination had painted it in glowing colours. She found, alas! coldness, suspicion, espionage, ceaseless bickerings, and petty jealousies. They had told her of heaven-

born calm and peace, but racking doubt and mental conflict were the burden of each day and hour. They had told her of rest within the convent walls from the cares of life, and the wear and tear of every-day existence; but, oh, what cares, how engrossing soever, what avocations however multiplied, assigned by the beneficent Parent in his gentle discipline of love, could by possibility equal the ceaseless strain of conventual activity—the perpetually recurring observances, the wasting mental and physical toil? They had told her of freedom from temptation, and the shield of proof which would be ever around her. Alas! snares and pitfalls of which her guileless imagination had never dreamed encircled her on every side.

Again and again, in broken and interrupted phases, her heart whispered all this; but she did not dare to shape its suggestions, or propound them clearly to herself. She intensely shrank from doing this. It was a truth as unwelcome as appalling, for she felt that her own hand had prepared her couch, and she must lie upon it; there was no deliverance for her in this world. They had indeed assured her that she would be at perfect liberty to withdraw, if she wished it, when her noviciate expired; but it needed no proof to convince her that this liberty was in name only.

Surrounded by lynx-eyed spies at every step, closely questioned as to every thought and feeling, every letter sent or received subject to inspection by superiors, renunciation of the *réligieuse* habit constantly represented as the first step towards eternal damnation—this boasted liberty was virtually a myth. None knew it better than those who held out the delusive prospect.

Could she, however, have dared to indulge a hope so futile as surmounting all this, what prospect had she outside the convent walls? When she thoughf of *that*, the cruel and unnatural deception she had practised was ever uppermost. The thought of meeting her injured parents caused a throb almost as of mortal pain. Death would be preferable to that. This was assuredly a mistake, for her sorrowful parents would gladly have received her with outstretched arms; but the measure she had meted withal was destined to return again into her own bosom, and the thought of home was vivid mental torture.

At the time we write, her conviction of the realities surrounding her could no longer be evaded or suppressed. Behind her was only remorse and anguish; before her a future of unrelieved gloom and fear. The tears, which were her nightly portion, poured in an uninterrupted stream through

her slender fingers. What havoc eighteen months had wrought in her once graceful and rounded form!

They talked of her final consecration two months hence. If that short cough, however, which ever and anon was audible amidst her grief, told truly, a fatal messenger was dogging her footsteps which would, at no distant period, bring the warrant of release from her vows. A brief while ago, in her happy home, she would have thought it hard; but now each premonition, however slight, was hailed —hailed, if even with a shudder, as she thought of the dark unknown beyond.

The service of the morning, which had seemed to her such mockery of human misery, had overwhelmed her with the sickening contemplation of her own irrevocable doom, now so near at hand. She weeps tears of burning gall, while the cry of her heart ascends to heaven.

"Poor wretch! poor wretch!" she murmurs in accents of self-pitying despair; "poor, poor lost one! Father, mother, come and save your child." Then, as though some inexpressibly bitter thought intruded, "But it cannot be. I deserve it all. I would not, dare not, look on your loved faces, if I might. Alas! I suffer the penalty of my sin." The tears flow afresh as she continues:

"Infatuated dreamer! Encircled with the mercies of a bountiful God, I cast them all from me to follow a path which He never marked out for any living being, forgetting that He could not run counter to the laws which He had established from the beginning. Oh, madness, madness! guilt, guilt!"

A long pause succeeded, broken only at intervals by a low, piteous wail, which tells of mighty anguish that cannot find relief. At length, rising from her crouching attitude, for she has not yet thrown aside her habit, she softly lifts the latch of the door and steals noiselessly from her cell. Along the corridor and down the steps she swiftly glides, proceeding in the direction of the chapel. No light illumines this, but the feeble lamp which is ever burning before the "blessed sacrament" on the altar. Towards this she bends her footsteps, and, throwing herself on her knees before it, she breathes out her soul to God in a fresh, though silent, agony of tears and prayer.

A slight movement near arrests her attention, and causes her to start up in vague terror. It is not an enemy however, for a low sob reveals a companion in tribulation. Neither speaks, for each fears to become known to the other. "Particular friendships" are among the cardinal sins of the community, and fellowship in such trouble

as is now weighing on the spirit of each would, if known, be visited with punishment. The unknown nun, who had been there first, does not seem, however, in haste to depart. She perhaps trusts the sob has not been noticed, and evidently would have it believed that she is engaged in prayer.

Encouraged by this proceeding, the novice resumes her kneeling posture, praying heartily (for her own grief has not yet made her selfish) for the sufferer to whom she is in such close proximity.

A sound, as of a slight fall, quickly engages her attention, followed by a heavy moan. Without a moment's hesitation, she goes to the side of the unfortunate one and endeavours to raise her. It was a sudden faintness; and the sensation occasioned by the fall has partially restored her consciousness. She strives to free herself from the grasp of her companion, as though wishful to preserve her disguise, murmuring as she does so something about having knelt too long.

The dim light effectually conceals her features from detection, but the novice can perceive enough to convince her that she is in the company of a sister of the black veil, one who has taken the irrevocable vows. Touched with sorrow for the distress to which her own heart so well supplies the clue, and forgetting for the moment all

prudential considerations, she exclaims, in tones of deep sympathy, "Let me help you, sister; let me stay with you, and comfort you."

The poor nun returns the kindness with a gentle pressure, shrinking however, at the same time, further into shadow, still anxious to preserve her incognito, and not trusting her voice to speak. The novice comprehends it all, and yet she lingers. "Are you better?" she again ventures to whisper, after a brief pause. "Can I do anything to assist you?"

The sister, who has by this time somewhat collected her energies, faintly murmurs, "No;" at the same time motioning her away.

The poor girl has no alternative but to obey; yet as she pursues her way to her own solitary cell, her heart grows heavier and heavier still at the thought of the misery of which she has been the involuntary witness. This nun knows all the secrets of the prison-house in which, in two months, she is to be hopelessly immured, and her heart is evidently breaking.

"Is there no avenue of hope? no possibility of escape?" her shuddering spirit asks. Alas! the thick darkness which reigns around her, unrelieved by one beam of light, seems but an emblem of her dreary and hopeless doom. Every influence

from within and without forbids the indulgence of the thought. Then does the iron hand of despair lay its relentless grasp upon her spirit, and from that hour she sinks a prey to pining melancholy and premature decline.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCRUPULOUS RÉLIGIEUSE, OR RIGHTEOUSNESS BY WORKS.

THERE was a nun whose interesting countenance and reverent demeanour had peculiarly attracted the ardent but inexperienced beholder of the tragedy of the morning. She was not really young in years, having numbered, perhaps, eight-and-thirty summers; but there was that nameless aspect of youth about her which in some survives time, circumstances, and the real progress of inward decay. It is a familiar proverb that such and such an one is "an evergreen." This she could hardly, perhaps, be called; nevertheless, she was one of those who in outward appearance hardly can be said ever to grow old. Austerities, mental wear and tear, and an unnatural mode of living had done their best to make her so; she had suffered what would have prematurely aged many a more vigorous frame, and made a sorrowful wreck

of many a stronger nature. But her patient goodness, her sweet self-judging humility, which ever represented to her that her sufferings were far less than her deserts, had endowed her with a power of endurance which had, to a certain extent, been her safeguard, or at least had prevented painful ulterior consequences from more swiftly ensuing.

Sincere conscientiousness had always been her characteristic. This had been the moving principle of her entrance on conventual life. Sincerely anxious to save her soul, and infatuated by the belief that she could not do so in the world, there was no alternative left to her but at once to enter on the only effectual and safe course. At the age of twenty-five, having refused an advantageous offer of marriage, under the belief before stated, she had become a postulant in the convent at N——; and though experiencing during the noviciate more difficulties than most, owing to her peculiar temperament, she had faithfully acted out her convictions, and become an exemplary *réligieuse*. By no means characterized by enthusiasm, however, but reflective, calculative, and experimental, conventual life could be no paradise to her; nor had she ever indulged in such an unreal dream. She had forecast its difficulties, and anticipated its requirements, so far as that was possible;

therefore, much that daunted others, after the first flush of excited fervour had passed away, fell powerless upon her. Nevertheless, inasmuch as it is impossible fully to foresee the future of any state of existence, because of the changes which we ourselves undergo, even could we guarantee that it should flow outwardly in a given channel, and much less to calculate all the phases presented by the monastic state to the ever-varying human heart; so was she not prepared for the dark intricate passages which presented themselves to her view as she passed along, ever, alas! gathering more gloom, and increasing in perplexity.

Without a shadow of mental reservation, even to the extreme of conscientiousness, had she from the moment of her entrance upon them performed every duty required by her state. But the discovery for which she was unprepared was the fact that in proportion as her fidelity and scrupulosity increased, so did her false conscience become more arbitrary, and its daily and hourly demands more exacting. She had entered upon the arduous and impossible course of satisfaction by the works of the law; and the more constantly and minutely she endeavoured "to continue in all things written in *her* law to do them," the more unsatisfying became her performance, the further she seemed

from the end at which she aimed. In truth, in proportion as, with zealous haste and bleeding feet, she pressed on towards the goal she sought, the more distant it appeared. It was for ever receding from her view. If at any time for the moment cheated into the belief she had at length neared it, mockingly it eluded her grasp afresh, and in blank dismay she turned again to take counsel with the perverted monitor within, which anew prompted her to a fresh chase, equally vain and disappointing. She was, in fact, that well-nigh most pitiable of all objects—*a scrupulous réligieuse.**

Little had she dreamed, when entering on her tortuous path, whither it would conduct her. The entrance had seemed fair and straight; and the promise had been of ever increasing breadth and freedom, issuing at length in a goodly land of self-achievement, misnamed sanctity, a quiet resting-place of self-satisfaction.

More fatally blinded, and naturally self-complacent natures, might, in an awful sense, have found this promise realized. That it is fearfully possible is proved every day in monastic life; but for Josephine such "a paradise of fools" never could exist. She possessed too instinctive a sense

* None but those who have so suffered can adequately tell what this means.

of what were her own demerits—saw in too severe a light her own short-comings. This native tendency to self-depreciation, if rightly directed and sanctified, might have blossomed into that loveliest of all Christian graces, genuine humility; as it was, it only resulted in such morbid and exaggerated scrupulosity as constituted an ever-present source of mental torture. The smallest religious obligations was forecast beforehand with minutest care; and when at length, with fear and trembling performed, was examined and re-examined in all its details, with such rigid, self-distrusting scrutiny, that it was infallibly converted into material for self-accusation, and denuded of every particle of consolation.

Through this distorted medium, indeed, every action of her life was viewed, so that in her daily walk, her commonest intercourse, she was incessantly treasuring up for herself a store of fresh and ever-accumulating mental disquiet. Did she enjoy the solitary half hour in the day devoted to recreation: she had indulged in some feeling contrary to the self-denying seriousness which should ever characterize a *religieuse*. Did she indulge in the commonest intercourse with any of her sisters: she had trenched on the obligation to have no "particular friendships." Did she feel the

claims of natural appetite stronger than common, and take her food with unusual zest: she had been guilty of sensuality. Did her wearied body assert its need of repose in languor, or a passing but unindulged feeling of drowsiness during the monotonous religious services: she had given way to sloth. And so on, through the daily revolving circle.

But the hallucination reached its climax at confession and communion. What would she have given for the satisfaction of being able to make a good confession and worthy communion! For years, in her own estimation, she had not done this. She never could remember all her morbid conscience accused her of when she went to confession; and if she could, it was impossible for her to explain it sufficiently, or prevent her untoward feelings causing her to present it in an unreal light. Consequently she was for ever, in her own judgment, making sacrilegious confessions, and, as an inevitable necessity, perpetrating unworthy communions. Vain were her confessor's directions on the point, and his commands to her to rest satisfied. This was an impossibility. Her conscience was diseased, radically diseased; and, alas! for that type of mania in the religious life there is *no remedy*.

This state of things, however, had not been the growth of a day or a month. For thirteen years she had worn the religious habit, and each revolving one had developed and matured the natural tendency to morbid self-depression. In the *purest* spiritual atmosphere her combat would have been with self, in one of its most subtle guises. Momentarily looking away from it to Jesus could have been the only remedy; but dwelling in the midst of the thick darkness of conventual teaching, where self in some insidious shape is the sole object of contemplation, how could the result have been other than it was? With *good self* held up to her gaze as the never-ceasing object of ambition, how could such a nature as hers be conscious of anything else but *bad self*, for ever springing up to thwart her desires, and bring her aims to nought?

The experience in its earliest stages was discouraging enough, and it took long to convince her that the same ordeal was for ever to be gone through. This conviction, however, had now been growing with a strength and intensity of which she herself was hardly aware for some time past, and the consequence was, internal conflict of the most distressing kind, often almost verging on despair.

Often and often in spirit would she exclaim, in

effect, though, alas! the words were unknown to her, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Again and ever did her most painful and faithful efforts come back to the true point, "I can do nothing." Her conscience proclaimed it, her soul re-echoed it with all its power, and then a dark blank presented itself before her vision—there was a dreary void. What human hand was powerful enough to write on the former words of acquittal and consolation? What human skill to fill the latter, and give the desolate spirit peace? Who can depict the sorrows of that sincerely-seeking soul? Who interpret the cry, the bitter, but voiceless cry, in that poor benighted heart?

Day by day she sat in darkness, vainly desiring and blindly groping for the light. But "there was no voice, nor any to answer"—no friendly aid to guide her weary feet into the way of salvation; and still evermore, though she writhed beneath their power, were the fetters more firmly and, as it seemed, inextricably riveted around her.

More and more scrupulous exactness, increased austerities, and relentless self-crucifixion in every shape, proclaimed her unquestionable sincerity; but while doing this, they only mocked her again with the echo of her heart's despairing cry. She

was at times well nigh driven to distraction. Scruples of every imaginable complexion became her companions day and night. She perceived no prospect of relief on this side the grave; and worse still, while they remained unsolved, no hope existed for her darkened soul of happiness hereafter.*

Though she knew it not, her mental vigour was seriously in danger of becoming undermined. Indeed it was melancholy to see the debasing effect that the superstition to which she was a slave had produced upon her originally fine mind. The added physical privations, which had long been the only response to her spirit's cry for rest, had also seriously reduced her bodily strength. She was accustomed to weakness, however, and a little more or less seemed hardly worth a thought. The body, with its cravings and necessities, had been too long made a secondary object for it to stand much chance of attention now, so its complainings were unheeded, its demands comparatively unmet, and the poor patient victim of conventual scrupulosity was gradually sinking into the grave, without

* This is no imaginary picture; it is the legitimate and inevitable effect of the teaching of Romanism on many sincere and scrupulous souls. To a lamentable extent, it was *my own.*

comfort, without light, and without a well-grounded hope of that eternal happiness, to secure which she had sacrificed all that renders life desirable.

Strangely enough, however, as it will seem to the enlightened mind, no thought of the possibility of error in her manner of seeking intruded upon her. Is it really strange? From the cradle she had imbibed the mental poison of Romanistic teaching; her opening intellect and expanding powers had been made tributary to its blighting and stultifying influence. The infallibility of the Church had been one of the earliest lessons taught her at her mother's knee. She would no more have dared to doubt it than she would her own existence; consequently *all* that the Church proposed to her belief was the object of her unquestioning faith. Freedom of thought was a sin; to reason upon anything this unimpeachable oracle imposed, or for a moment to scruple to follow whithersoever she led, was not a thing to be thought of by any docile child.

However marked by inconsistency and calculated to excite reflection some of her dogmas and practices may appear to those who are in a position to obey the apostolic command, "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good," such an one as we have described never dreams of indulging the reasoning faculties God has given—simply because she

dares not. An incubus like a nightmare rests upon her faculties. They are cramped and fettered at every turn. The unerring tribunal to which she has been taught to surrender her judgment has thought for her, and pronounced an irrefragible opinion, from which there is no appeal. It is needless impertinence and dangerous presumption to inquire further. God has spoken through the Divine agency He has appointed to define the limits of faith and decree doctrine; therefore the more unhesitating and blind the obedience rendered, the more pleasing in his sight.

In this vitiated circle Josephine had moved throughout her life. For her there had seemed no possibility of getting beyond it. Had any glimpse of a wider sphere for a moment presented itself, even in fancy, she had turned from it as from a region of fatal miasma or blighting pestilence. *Outside* its charmed precincts, her reason had been to her a useless gift, which she not only was forbidden to exercise, but the very existence of which she was bound to ignore. Can it be any subject of wonder, then, that though bowed to the earth by the yoke which she carried, and feeling continually more and more its galling and oppressive character, she yet never questioned its legitimacy, or indulged in a thought hostile to its claims?

Meekly and uncomplainingly did her wearied feet tread the thorny path which she had marked out for herself. She never spoke to those about her of her sufferings, mental or physical. *Atonement—atonement* for past sin and shortcoming, was the one idea ever present to her mind; and the more complicated the pangs she endured, the more hope she entertained of their efficacy. To tell others of her burden would have been to attempt to mitigate it, and so to diminish its hoped-for merit. The delusive hectic on her cheek, and the unnatural brightness in her eye, helped to lessen, to superficial readers, the legibility of the record which was really written on her brow—"passing away." The patient resignation which sat upon her countenance, and her gentle smile, veiled continually the unnatural strife which was destroying her. None guessed how rapidly the sands in her glass were running out, herself least of all. But the struggle was well-nigh over, the fitful fever fast drawing to its close.

For some days an unusual sense of exhaustion had compelled her at times, against her will, to pause in her arduous tasks, and take unwonted and unseasonable rest. The excitement of this day, in which she had borne her part with steadfast determination, had been succeeded by prostration

she could neither combat nor rally from. At an unusual hour she had obtained leave to retire to rest. It was rest in name only. After the first hour of bodily repose had passed away, the mind resumed its troubled sway. She turned wearily upon her pallet, ever and anon sighing heavily. "No good action all these years. So many bad confessions! so many sacrilegious communions!"

For many moments thought was busy; then again she spoke: "Yet I have tried, I *have* tried. I have never meant to do all this wrong. Jesus and Mary, help me!" Another pause, followed by a groan. "Shall I ever make a good confession? Can I? It is impossible to remember all now—*all*, through this long, long time. O God, to live with mortal sin unconfessed—in the constant commission of sacrilege! Horrible!"

Palliating thoughts seemed struggling for ascendancy.

"I know I have not done it wilfully; I have hated it, hated myself, all the time. Yet I *have* done it; there is no help for that. Father Wilfrid tells me not to fear; but he does not know me."

For some time she repeated, apparently with much feeling, a Latin formula in which the names of the Blessed Virgin and the saints were distinctly audible. At the close, the "Agnus Dei"

was heard. Was the trust in this "Lamb of God," or in the foregoing multiplied invocations? Alas! alas! all these had been to move this blessed Saviour to the exercise of his compassion—to entreat these saints, and her who equally with them was saved by his blood alone, to intercede with Him on behalf of the poor benighted one, who knew Him but as some heathen idolater may know his god—viz., as an object of terror, to be approached only through intermediate agencies and inferior mediators.

Silence ensued, broken only by movements which denoted mental unrest. At length, as though soliloquizing, she muttered, "Works of supererogation! Blessed saints, how rich you have been in these!—St. Rose, St. Teresa,; but I—I—only sin, sin! Yet I thought this life would have conducted me to some small share of your blessedness. Is there hope? Can there be," she continued, after a brief interval. "All seems darkness and despair—*such* darkness! Holy mother of God, my queen, my advocate, pray for me. Make a way of escape for me from the terrible dangers which seem to encircle me on every hand. Help me at least to make a good confession, if only one, even at the last! I love you, my mother, my mediatrix; you have always given me the grace of

devotion to your blessed person. Have pity on me, and hear my prayer!"

Heavily fell back the echo of her words upon her own heart. The walls could not speak, and thick darkness rested on all around. The nightly fever which was consuming her increased her overwrought feeling of intense wretchedness. She rose upon her couch, exclaiming, in accents of thrilling pathos, as though some foreshadowing of her doom for the first time crossed her mind, "Death! death! How can I die with all this load upon my conscience? It will sink me to perdition!" Reiterated supplications, chiefly to the Blessed Virgin and the saints, again followed. But, oh! how far off was God, the Father of his people—Christ the ever-present, perfect Saviour, who has been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. It is true both names were mentioned, as before; but how deprecatingly; with what slavish fear; with what dishonouring dread!

It was a heart-rending and humiliating spectacle—one over which angels might well have bent with pity, and over which the true Church on earth may weep. The "jealous God" outraged, the "one Mediator" practically set at nought. The human mother of the God-man, and saints and angels, some doubtless fabulous, placed on that mediatorial throne,

from which the Redeemer was *in fact ejected*. The sincere victim of a false creed, who was gasping for the water of life, and would have given her existence for one true beam of light, groping in this midnight darkness, and destined hopelessly still to grope in it until eternity dawned on her beclouded vision. On all within that abode of spiritual death was inscribed "No change;" on every dreary portal, "No escape."

In the agony of her spiritual conflict, she noted not her physical discomposure. She only knew that she felt less able than usual to combat with her distress; that an unusual apprehension of the dread realities beyond the grave was pressing heavily upon her mind, and that *pray she must to some higher power*. No relief followed her renewed supplications. Surely "her gods were asleep, and must be awaked, or had gone on a journey," so unmoved were they by her entreaties, so deaf to her cries. Not one gleam of hope or comfort could she gather. Purgatory, with all its unknown horrors, was the most mitigated picture her imagination conceived concerning the future. *If* she escaped a more terrible doom, no hope beyond this she dared to entertain; and for how long a period, and how severe must her purgatory be! It was a harrowing subject, but

she could not shake it off. The sword of justice hung suspended over her head. Here or hereafter atonement must be made for sin; and she had failed to make it, as she had fondly hoped to have done, when she had entered on the conventual life. What, then, remained but the alternative of doing so in the penal fires of the world to come?

No kindly whisper bore to the fainting soul the message of free mercy and forgiveness. Not one breath of heavenly love and pity fanned that burning brow. For ever debarred from the light of God's own teaching, by the craft and subtlety of man, amidst the gloomy shades of ever-deepening error, was she destined to wander, until the night of death closed over the scene, and ushered her into the realities beyond.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FANATIC: ANOTHER PHASE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY WORKS.

In the adjoining cell to that occupied by Josephine, there is one still more desolate in appearance. An angle in the wall cuts off a corner, leaving yet less room for locomotion. Of almost every article of bare convenience, such as even the stern rule of the community allows, it is denuded. The sole furniture it contains is a small iron bedstead, of rude construction. The hard surface of this is not covered by even a mattress, nor is the luxury of a pillow afforded. A log of wood, by no means the smoothest or most polished, appears the only substitute, while a coverlid, of the coarsest woollen material, lies rolled up at the feet of the uninviting couch, as though to intimate that it is a comfort but seldom used. The being who occupied this miserable bed during the three or four hours of sleep she

allowed herself, knelt at its side, rapidly repeating the "Litany of the Blessed Virgin." This was followed by that of the saints, and a string of other prayers, almost entirely addressed to the heavenly host. After about an hour thus consumed, she rose, and began slowly to unfasten her habit.

It was difficult to decide as to her probable age, so prematurely worn and wan was the pale countenance. The figure had been originally tall, but was so stooping and emaciated that it bore more resemblance to one bowing under the influence of disease, or beginning to bend under the weight of years, than that of a woman who ought to have been in the prime of life, and of an unbroken constitution. The former was actually the case, and the latter would have been, had the natural vigour which God had given her been fairly used, and applied to the purposes for which it was imparted. She was a widow, and her actual age was thirty-five.

During her married life she had been fashion's devotee, and a lover of the pleasures of the world. Deprived of her husband, however, to whom she was passionately attached, by an unforeseen accident, her whole nature appeared to undergo a sudden revulsion. Henceforth the

current of her life was changed, and her disgust of the world became as great as heretofore her enthusiastic participation in its follies had been remarkable. Sick at heart, and weary of everything around her, the voice which in her quieter moments had often proclaimed to her inmost spirit the unsatisfactory nature of the portion she was choosing, again made itself heard. She resisted no longer. The object which had been the god of her soul's idolatry was lost to her for ever. Henceforth a hue as of the grave rested on all below.

She yearned for what she felt the world could never give her—balm for her anguished heart, rest for her troubled spirit. Eternity, too, with all its awful realities, seemed ever present: how near it really might be she had recently had sorrowful proof. To live for this her conscience had always told her was her highest wisdom. Now the necessity seemed laid upon her. Surely God Himself had spoken in this bitter dispensation. Whither was He calling her? What blessed haven of holy calm and heavenly security was it that passed again and again before her mental vision, until it filled her thoughts by day, and haunted her dreams by night? Not the compassionate heart of Him who has said, "Come

unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Alas! she knew Him not. It was the convent cell; where, far from an ensnaring world, she may devote the remainder of existence to atonement for past follies, working out her soul's salvation, and pious supplications for the loved and lost.

The idea, as she brooded upon it, became more and more attractive and engrossing, until a passionate yearning filled her soul, and all else losing in the comparison, her present lot grew more distasteful every day. She lived in a world of fancy's creating, and all that appeared alien to its imaginary claims was regarded with intense suspicion and disrelish. Need I say the result was what it ever must be in the Roman Church—a plunge from extreme worldliness into the very depths of fanaticism?

Possessed of a large inheritance by the death of her husband, it may easily be conceived that dispositions so promising to the interests of the Church were not permitted to languish for want of fostering care. In this instance also her confessor, a sincere man, though a narrow-minded and bigoted one, had the motive of concern for her salvation, as well as the weal of the Church, for cherishing such pious inclinations. With the

utmost zeal he did cherish them; and so successfully that before the anniversary of her loss came round, she had taken the white veil in the convent at N——, and commenced a religious life of more than usual fervour and austerity. Such a life once commenced, where the mind is thoroughly imbued with superstition, is always a life of progress. The spirit of *self-exaction* infallibly becomes more and more arbitrary and unrelenting as it is yielded to and fostered.

So long as the Evil one can persuade man that he can *merit* by his doings—to say nothing of laying up stores of superfluous merit, which is one of the doctrines of the so-called Apostolic Church—there will be no limit to the lengths to which his fanaticism will carry him. Comfort, ease, health, life, are all minor considerations, not to be entertained for a moment, in comparison with this all-important result. Even death, accruing from such a laudable undertaking, should God permit it, would but be the crowning triumph of all, and ensure a safe passage at once to heaven, always supposing that the victim was acting in the spirit of obedience.

To have her purgatory here, and lay up such a store of merit for herself as must stand her in good stead when she comes to die, is the life-long

effort of many a poor *réligieuse*. Firmly impressed with the conviction that by works, at least in part, she is saved, and that her failings and shortcomings must be atoned for by suffering, here or hereafter, if her mind is of that order on which this species of fanaticism takes a firm hold, she becomes forthwith a dévotee of the first class, and an aspirant, however humble, for that order of saintship, which *possibly*, by some fortuitous chain of circumstances, may, long after the death of all parties concerned, result in canonization.

Of just such a type was the mind of her whom we are attempting to describe. And without being at first at all aware whither it would lead her, she had commenced a promising pupilage in this school of insidious self-exaltation. The results dawned upon her by degrees, but they did not intimidate her. She was not one of those who, daunted by unforeseen sufferings, draw back with a purpose but half accomplished. To every fresh exaction demanded by a darkened and false conscience, she readily submitted; yea, so thoroughly had she become imbued with the spirit of self-seeking, that her feet ran rapidly along the thorny road she had begun to tread; and no penance or mortification appeared too hard, no amount of self-

crucifixion too great or too severe to be practised and endured.

The priest who had been her confessor ever since her entrance into the convent, had at first rather discouraged this tendency to ascetical severity. Finding, however, that an opposite course would be the surest safeguard to his own absolute dominion over her, he had pursued a different policy, and given the rein to all her austere predilections. So at the time we have introduced her to the reader, she was far advanced in a life of unnatural infliction, and the practice of heathenish physical torture.

We said she rose from her knees, and began slowly to unfasten her habit. It was not, however, for the purpose of disrobing. That she never did night or day, except to use the discipline, or on those occasions—few and far between—when her suffering body was permitted the luxury of a little water.

The act was performed simply to unloose for a few hours, while she tried to sleep, the iron chain which, when awake, she continually wore round her body. As she did so, a cross was discoverable underneath the chain, pressed to her heart, and as for an instant she removed it, as if for momentary relief, its sharpened edges turned inward were

distinctly observable; and the festering wound they had made was also plainly manifest. With stern resolution, however, she replaced the instrument of torture in the channels it had carved for itself in her flesh, and placing her hand over it, fixed it more firmly into the wound.

Then murmuring some Latin adjuration, she laid down on her wretched pallet. Not to sleep, however. Nature craved for it, her frame wasted and pined for it, her aching head demanded it; but the poor abused body was too much racked with pain to admit of repose, even for a brief moment. Sore and lacerated from the effects of the discipline which she had used so unsparingly during the day as to cause the blood to flow freely, it was impossible she could rest on that miserable couch. It was as much as she could do to *constrain* herself to lie upon it for the brief space she did. At length, indeed, even her stern will gave way, and she was compelled to rise.

For some time she paced the room with unequal steps, repeating the rosary. Her voice, however, grew weaker. She tottered, and involuntarily looked round, as though in quest of a seat. There was none, but the hard cold stretcher of iron, misnamed her bed. On this, half fainting, she

fell. The pain caused by the concussion at once restored her wandering consciousness; and exhausted, but unable to repose from self-inflicted suffering, fainting for want of the commonest necessaries of life, yet denying herself even those allowed by conventual rule, the infatuated victim of a superstition well nigh as dark as that of the darkest idolater, dragged out the intervening space before that blessed daylight dawned, which brought no light to her.

Christian reader, this is an appalling picture, and perhaps you are ready to ask, Is it not overdrawn? So far from this, believe me it falls short, far short, of the oftimes terrible reality. If not, even Roman Catholic writers themselves, of grave and reverend character, propagate falsehoods.

In proof of my assertion, I need but refer you to the "Lives of the Saints," by the Rev. Alban Butler, or, to come to a work of more recent date, "The Lives of St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Francis de Girolamo, St. John Joseph of the Cross, St. Pacificus of San Severino, and St. Veronica Giuliani," edited by N. Wiseman, D.D., Bishop of Melipotamus, and published in 1846. I refer chiefly to the latter life—viz., St. Veronica. Read also the lives of St. Rose of Lima, St. Mary

Magdalen de Pazzis, and St. Catharine of Sienna.*

If these do not furnish proof positive that I have modified rather than exaggerated the outlines of my slight sketch, then reject it as unworthy of credit.

To some of the monstrous excesses and unnatural enormities delineated in these "Lives," and vindicated, yea, set forth as laudable, under the names of "sanctity" and "holy austerity," it is indeed difficult to give credence. Certainly, *if true*, they are frightful evidence of the hopeless depth of awful apostasy to which the Church of Rome has fallen, and into which she lures her votaries. They speak more than volumes countless, and homilies without end, as to her fearful departure from the truth as it is in Jesus, and from the simplicity of Christian belief and practice. If *not* to be relied upon—if these narratives are wholly, or even partly, unworthy of credit, in what a position does it place the reverend propagators of such a tissue of outrageous and sickening fables!

* A good translation of the three last lives from the Roman Breviary, for general circulation, would be a boon. There are, however, some interesting extracts from this source in the work before quoted—viz., "Nuns and Nunneries." (See Chapter iii.)

The alternative is a painful one; but we have no other. Either that these grave authorities write and publish unreliable falsehoods deliberately and with a purpose to mislead, or such a picture as I have briefly and imperfectly attempted to sketch falls very far below the harrowing truth; and if so, what can be said forcible enough to delineate, yea, what language can possibly depict, the pitiable condition of the poor deluded ones who are the victims of error so dark, and doctrines so fatal and ruinous?

Amongst the gloomy mass of false teaching and soul-destroying superstitions in that Church, there is perhaps none so *cruel* as this. Not only does it destroy all possibility of happiness in the world to come, but it renders the present life as supremely wretched as malignant ingenuity can make it. There is neither hope on this side the grave nor on the other. But clinging, alas, to a false one, the poor, deceived visionary goes blindfold to hell from the very midst of her dreams of the heaven she vainly hopes to have merited. Oh, what shall be the reckoning of those who have thus ensnared and misled the priceless, immortal spirits, for which the Redeemer shed his blood?

What, at that tremendous assize where we must all appear, shall be the sentence of those who,

under the guise of shepherds, have inveigled the defenceless lambs into the lair of the wolf of hell? The thought is too dreadful to dwell upon; but surely, if anything can add poignant intensity to the horrors of the fearful doom, it will be this, that the deceived and ruined ones must be the ever-present witnesses of their guilt, their never-ceasing upbraiders and tormentors, throughout an eternity of woe.

From the awful destiny of the misleaders or the misled may God, in his mercy, deliver all who read these pages!

CHAPTER X.

THE MOTHER AND CHILD.

THERE is one at this midnight hour whose couch is literally wet with her tears. She, too, is a widow, but not a childless one, for she has left her innocent daughter outside the convent walls, for ever given over to the care of strangers. It is for this cause that she weeps. There are hours when the voice of nature will make itself heard in her soul. She has striven religiously, or rather *ir*religiously, long and zealously to stifle and silence it; but as time rolls on, she is destined to feel that the effort grows more hopeless, the task more utterly beyond her power. Left a widow early, ascetical predilections which before her marriage had been occasionally entertained as a sort of pious dream, again gained the ascendant; and as there was no lack of careful nurture, they soon became deeply-rooted and abiding.

Her little girl was the only obstacle to the

fulfilment of the "vocation," which her fanaticism led her to believe she had received from heaven. It would be cruelly wronging her to say that the struggle with her mother's heart, and the closely-clinging human tie, was not deep and severe. At first she dared not look the thought in the face; and when she summoned courage to do this, the conflict was sharp and long. Even after the trying resolve was almost formed, some guileless question, or sweet childish word or act, of the little one, all unconscious of the meditated desertion, would for the moment scatter it to the winds, and cause her to clasp her darling more closely to her bosom. But the Romish Church lacks not weapons for every warfare; it deals with hearts as unceremoniously as the player with the pieces on the chess-board, keeping only one paramount object in view, the winning of the game. Vain were all currents of opposition, from whatever quarter they came. The contest was in skilful hands, and the assurance of victory, where only a weak woman's heart was concerned, as certain as though it was already achieved.

For awhile the human feeling was tolerated—was even represented as lawful and commendable; but beyond a certain time or point, it became sin! for "what else could it be termed, when it issued in

rebellion against Him who had so evidently called her to become his bride—his spouse?" What course then remained to her but to resist the tempter courageously and at once? By listening farther to his suggestions she might forfeit her vocation. He who distinguished her by a call to his service would doubtless take care of her little one. Nay, were not the open arms of the Church ready to receive her? Was not its fostering care especially extended to those whose natural protectors had forsaken all for Christ? And though in the convent school, connected with the order which her mother was about to enter, it was impossible for her to be received, because of that parent's presence there; yet there were numberless others, where no such obstacle existed, who would gladly protect and cherish her.

Blindfolded by superstition, the poor priest-led victim listened, and servilely obeyed. Henceforth the iron heel of fanaticism deliberately strove to repress and trample down—if it could not uproot—the sacred natural affections which had been bestowed by God. Sighs, heart-ache, and an involuntary weight of indescribable misery, which would sometimes oppress the spirit, were offered up as a holocaust well pleasing to *the loving* Redeemer. The keener the suffering, the

more acceptable in his sight! Another element which was represented as increasing the value of the offering, was this: While consecrating herself to God, by giving up her child to the guardianship of the Church, did she not *virtually* consecrate *her* to Him also?

To a convent many miles distant, the helpless and deserted child was therefore consigned; there to be carefully nurtured in the faith which had brought forth such fruits in her mother. She had felt the parting much, for she was more than commonly affectionate; but the belief that by and by she should return home again (for it had been deemed wisest not at present to communicate the real nature of the separation), had comforted her under it.

How well the mother remembered the morning which had separated her from her child! how indelibly every word, every look were engraven on her heart! She had striven faithfully and prayerfully to banish them as a sin against the state she had embraced, and had sometimes appeared partially to succeed; but ever and anon, at some unexpected turn, or inopportune moment, the imperishable record would assert its power, as freshly and as pungently as at the first moment that it was stamped upon the memory. Scrupulously, however

committing all her conflicts to the analysis of the arbiters of her spiritual destiny, her resolution throughout the postulate, and noviciate, had been kept from flagging. The final vows were spoken, and Sister Jane Frances, emulating the spirit of her patron saint,* who walked over the prostrate body of her child, rather than that her purpose of leaving *all* to become a *réligieuse* should be frustrated, had immolated both herself and her daughter on the altar of superstition.

The deadness of feeling, misnamed "calm elevation," which she had fondly hoped would succeed the consummation of the holocaust, was however very far from ensuing. A temporary lull, akin to stupor, as she reflected that the irrevocable deed was done, certainly followed it; but even this was of brief duration. The enthusiasm and excitement attendant upon the step once passed, dull reality pressed home, and the cold unvarying routine, and wearing monotony of her existence, affording no outward relief, gave ample scope to the intruders, *thought* and *feeling*.

If her conflicts had been previously bitter, what were they to those which henceforth tormented her! It was useless to reflect that she was now the consecrated bride of the Redeemer, and that human

* St. Jane Frances de Chantal. See Life.

emotions were a sin against her heavenly Bridegroom: like a torrent spurning all barriers, at times the pent-up feelings would have way. The nature God had implanted in her soul could not be eradicated; the human heart, his gift, could not be converted into an icicle. At matins the much-loved form would mingle with her orisons; and at vesper-song her sweet voice seem loudest in the choir. But night was the avenger. How, in its unbroken solitude, would the soft arms cling about her neck, the eloquent eyes plead with hers, and the low thrilling accents chime pathetic music in her very soul! And then, amidst the sacred gush of feeling, would come the harrowing reflection—"Lost, lost to me *for ever!* Never again can those arms embrace me, never again that cheek be pressed to mine, never again those loved tones breathe their melody in this poor lonely ear." The hours destined to sleep were involuntarily consecrated to weeping; and with tenfold bitterness did the tears fall, as she remembered that far away amongst strangers must her forsaken child discover the hard truth that mother and home were gone for ever, and learn to appreciate the nature of the cruel deception which had been practised upon her. Yet such hold had fanaticism still on her enthralled mind, that all this was succeeded by a

painful feeling of guilt, and intenser one of condemnation.

That such thoughts *would* come, and such feelings were involuntary, constituted no valid excuse: that she, at times, contended with them, and wrestled hard to suppress them, did not afford her more satisfaction. *Wrong*, her creed taught her, they were; and in the light of SIN she was therefore impelled to consider them. So her conflict between the voice of nature in her soul, and imaginary evil, was continual and distracting, and threatened ere long, if not assuaged, to undermine her fine constitution, and make her a physical, if not a mental, wreck.

The scene of to-day had recalled her own solemn consecration two years ago. Though preserving exterior calmness, with feelings so complex that they well-nigh drove her to despair had she mingled in the show. Regret and pity for the victim, none the less deep because she could not define the feeling, had blended with her own anguish and self-condemnation; and now she lay exhausted on her pillow, a prey to emotions which it would be well-nigh impossible to analyze, much less describe.

A strange vision of the years to come floated before her eyes, in which her daughter was the chief

actor. She saw it all, to its minutest detail, and turned away, sick at heart. Why? Had you asked her the question, perchance her lips dared not have framed a reply, if her heart would have known how to do so; for she was a sincere Romanist still. Did she fear to contemplate for her, whom she too surely felt was still her heart's idol, a fate the untold dreariness of which she was beginning so painfully to appreciate? She would have trembled to admit this even to herself, had she fully deciphered it; but it is a guess near the truth. Need I say it was the instinctive cry of the mother's heart, "Shield my darling from suffering," of which the length, and depth, and height cannot be comprehended?

It is a vain cry, however—a worse than futile shrinking. Alas! the next moment she feels this too well. She has deliberately consigned her child to a probably inevitable destiny, and no power of hers can avail to avert it now. So beneath the bitter, hopeless sense of her helplessness she continues to weep the tears that are wasting her life away.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AWAKENING.

One had been witness of that drama to-day, whose feelings had been perhaps of a more complex and pitiable description than either of those I have attempted to portray.

Four years ago she had become a convert to the Church of Rome; and in the first flush of that mysterious enthusiasm and misplaced zeal, which so strangely infatuates and misleads many similarly ensnared, had taken upon herself those so-called "religious obligations" which rendered her for ever a bond-slave to the system she had embraced.

She had done this despite the prayers and tears of her parents, and the warnings and entreaties of her friends.

For a time things had glided on smoothly in regard to her. That is, she was possessed of a more than common amount of fervour, and an unusual

share of physical strength, of spirits unbroken, and with a mind hitherto unclouded by a thought of care. Nothing in the shape of self-denial had daunted her; nay, it had rather subtly fed her spiritual pride. The renunciation of her will had seemed easy; and the fetters, mental as well as physical, with which she had voluntarily encircled herself, she gloried in, feeling an inexplicable satisfaction in implicitly subjecting herself to the will of those whom she had chosen as her guides and rulers.

Endeavouring to believe unquestioningly all that was proposed to her belief; studiously excluding every thought alien to the claims of the Church, and faithfully confessing them, however momentary or involuntary; rigorously performing every minutest obligation of conventual rule, and fulfilling each claim of her vocation, she had appeared a hopeful disciple of the priest-led school, a promising candidate for saintship; while, wrapped in her own self-righteous delusions, she seemed in a fair way to sink deeper and deeper into the mire of superstition, and become an entire prey to that spiritual blindness which can only result in spiritual death.

But she had once sat beneath the sound of the gospel; she had once felt the blessed influence of

truth; she had once been a student of the pure Word of God. When she became the victim of the ruthless policy and spiritual tyranny of the dark and idolatrous Church of Rome, however, gospel truth and God's own Word had been entombed beneath the superincumbent mass of rubbish which in that Church overlies all that is pure and true, and blocks up every avenue to light. Through mercy divine, it had been only buried, not lost; overgrown and hidden, not destroyed.

Those germs of truth, sown by a mother's fostering care in infancy, again and again watered and nourished in after-life by God's own hand, were not thus finally to perish. After the lapse of three years of unremitting prosecution of the requirements of the life on which she had entered, a sharp and sudden illness had seized her. The crisis, rather we should say, was sudden; for it was but the result of foregone austerities, and the unnatural regimen to which she had been subjected. Death seemed to stare her in the face. Apparently reduced to the last extremity, yet perfectly and strangely conscious, the dread realities of the eternity to come were fearfully pressed home upon her troubled spirit.

She confessed, but it brought no satisfaction; communicated, but found no relief. In vain

was she reminded that she had given up all for Christ; that she had edified the sisterhood; that, as the faithful bride of Christ, He looked upon her with especial love, and her happiness was secured. Her disquiet continued. She looked backward, and saw no ground for hope or assurance; forward, and perceived no foundation on which to rest her trembling soul. To her mind, which had once known the truth, all was darkness, thick darkness, unrelieved by one gleam of light. Hopelessly did she turn to the right hand and to the left, but there was none to whisper peace.

Then, as in shuddering despair she murmured the prayer of the publican of old, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" there came thronging back upon her tortured memory bitter recollections of truth forgotten, of God's written Word slighted, of his Spirit resisted, and his love grieved; while self — sinful self, righteous self — assumed its real character, and took its proper place. And as she gazed into this mental mirror, and saw what she was, and where she stood, and all she had been trying to do, at its actual worth—viz., as an unmitigated tissue of pharisaical pride and self-seeking—the scales fell from her eyes, revealing the system on which she had been building, as on a sure foundation, in its native unsubstantiality and

deformity, and dissipating its claims for ever on her trust and allegiance.

So terrible was the awakening, that her consciousness forsook her; and as swoon succeeded swoon, she was thought to be passing away. The priest was summoned to administer the last sacraments, and repeat the prayers for the dying by her bed; and as she at length gave evidence of returning life, she found herself surrounded by the kneeling sisterhood, audibly responding to the litany for the departing, in which the whole army of martyrs, saints, and confessors—indeed, the multitude of the heavenly host—are adjured to receive the passing spirit.

The night following there was a turn in her disorder, and the medical attendant gave hopes of life. She recovered: it was almost wonderful she did so, considering what a mental burden she carried. But she had youth, and a naturally vigorous constitution on her side; and though she had succumbed for the time to unfair usage and harsh treatment, her natural elasticity gained the ascendancy, subdued somewhat, but not destroyed.

It is true her recovery was slow. They thought so, and thought too that a cloud seemed on her spirit. But as she made no complaint, it was

attributed to physical weakness, and not too curiously inquired into. By the physician's order she was allowed to spend much of her time in the convent garden; and who can describe the character of the emotions which agitated her bosom in these hours of lonely communion with her own heart?

As spiritual light increased, how dense appeared the midnight by which she was surrounded; how insupportable and repugnant the legal observances, the vain round of ceremonial and puerile superstitions which, if faithful to her vows, she was *bound* to practise and believe in while life remained; and as the hopelessness of her position pressed chillingly upon her heart, how faithfully did the relentless chronicler, Conscience, recal the warnings slighted, the admonitions rejected, the entreaties and prayers of parental love set at nought and lightly esteemed!

Passage after passage of revealed truth now shone forth in meridian clearness, which there was no possibility of dimming or evading; of old as familiar as household words, but which of late had been made to bow to sophistical interpretation, and garbled and adulterated to suit a theory. God's voice could no longer be hushed, nor his Spirit commanded thence.

In the sunny noon, beneath the waving trees, with the breath of heaven fanning her fevered cheek, she was compelled to listen, and as she heard she trembled. In the solemn midnight hour, with no outward agency to lessen the solemnity, or distract the attention, it spoke, and fearfully the accents fell on her innermost soul. All her idols fell before it. The shrine at which she had worshipped now stood forth as the shrine of Belial. She dared no longer worship there *in spirit*. What course, then, lay before her? The inquiry was easy of solution; it was fruitless for imagination to travel round it. There was one of two alternatives—hypocrisy of the most painful kind, or sincerity, followed by a course of nameless persecution and suffering, from the contemplation of which the flesh shrank back in dismay.

Continued and protracted were the internal conflicts she endured, and intense the suffering consequent upon them. But for the hour the flesh triumphed. The present and palpable gained the ascendency over the unseen and invisible. As that invisible, recently so near, receded farther from view, the present suffering assumed undue magnitude. And though her heart was lacerated by self-reproach, and she was continually the subject of an upbraiding conscience, she could not

summon resolution to confess her state of mind, and steadfastly abide the issue.

At times she prayed earnestly for courage; but she lacked as yet the true element of courage, faith in God, and love to Him. She had wandered so far, had so wilfully closed her eyes to the light, and so persistently rejected all counsel and warning, that she could not, though *seeing* the truth in all its beauty, *yet* divest her mind sufficiently of the spirit of the system with which she had been so long identified as to "behold" simply for herself "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world," and receive Him, a present Saviour, into her heart. This only could have given strength and imparted consolation; but without it she was helpless and wretched, bowed down beneath the intolerable load of a guilty conscience, yet pressed still lower by the knowledge that the God against whom she had offended, she had not courage to confess, and that the moment she did so would be the commencement outwardly of unknown suffering.

Oh, how she wrestled in agony with herself and her despair! How bitterly she condemned the insane folly which in one moment had voluntarily spoken her own irrevocable doom, and rendered it for ever impossible for those whose

hearts would have bled to save her, to render her the slightest aid, or even to know her pitiable and hopeless condition. How vainly she yearned after that love which had watched over her infancy and girlhood, and so faithfully but fruitlessly warned her of the bitter consequences of the step she was taking. But her mother was in a foreign land. Unable to endure her home after her daughter had left it; with broken spirits and failing strength, she had sought relief and renewed vigour, in change of scene and climate.

Yet even had she remained within reach, of what avail could it have been to her imprisoned child? Never permitted to see her but in the presence of witnesses, closely guarded at every step, her very looks under surveillance, it would have been hopeless for Cecile to attempt to communicate her state of mind, for the slightest suspicion would perhaps have been sufficient to prevent all hope of her ever being permitted to see her mother more. She knew all this, and felt it in its uttermost intensity, as she did every other element of her grief; but the sharpest pang of all was the sad consciousness that she had no one but herself to blame; that her own hand had forged the fetter which nothing but death could unclasp.

Nights spent in conflict and anguish, which language is powerless to describe, were followed by days of apparent calmness and outward conformity, the hypocrisy of which was again the subject of remorse and sorrow of the keenest kind. During the profession spoken of in our opening chapter, she had worn this mask so well as to have been one of those whose devotional demeanour and seeming placidity had particularly impressed the young spectator. But what had been her actual state of mind, only He whose eyes run to and fro through the earth could know. One intense feeling of yearning pity for the infatuated victim had held every other in suspense. Even her own sorrows were for the moment lost sight of, as she thought of the *future* of that innocent young girl; that future of which she could now so truly form an estimate. Oh, how her bosom burned to save her—how she longed to arrest the fatal words which unalterably sealed her destiny.

Her emotions were, however, only indicated by the intensity of her gaze, which conveyed to a *close* observer a world of meaning; to a more distant one, that illusive calmness which was so calculated to mislead. The tragedy concluded, she joined the crowd in their congratulations. She

felt her words were false, and they trembled on her tongue; but what could she do? To have refused to do so would have aroused suspicion. It was but one of many acts of duplicity circumstances *forced* upon her daily. Thus she strove to quiet her conscience. Night came, however, bringing with it solitude, when many tones intrude, and many inward whispers are heard, which in "garish day" we easily manage to suppress. The faithful teacher then spoke out, and while she groaned, as she contemplated the sadness of her position, she groaned still more heavily as she thought of her accumulated guilt in the sight of that merciful God in Christ, whom she was too cowardly to confess, and against whom she was continually offending, by wearing a garb of outward conformity to superstitious practices and idolatrous worship, in which her heart no longer participated; yea, which she felt to be an offence against Him, and evil and sinful in the highest degree.

Long and long she remained that night on her knees, in an agony of remorse, tears, and prayer. The spirit of prayer was given her. She wrestled with the Angel of the Covenant, and prevailed. Eternal love which had purchased her pardon, spoke peace to her troubled spirit.

"She heard the voice of Jesus say,
Come unto Me and rest,
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast.

"She came to Jesus as she was—
Weary, and worn, and sad;
She found in Him a resting-place,
And He had made her glad."

In the strength of his love and in the power of her new-born faith, she resolved boldly to confess Christ on the morrow. She can no longer league with his betrayers. She must leave results to Him.

The morrow dawns at length, and as early as it is possible to obtain it, she seeks an interview with the confessor of the convent. What passed there will never fully be revealed to other ears. But that the timid and trembling Cecile witnessed a good confession may be inferred from the fact that she is henceforth separated from the other *réligieuses*, and condemned almost exclusively to solitude. If you ask me what the sequel will be, should she be enabled to maintain the profession she has made, I cannot tell. She *may* be conveyed to Belgium, under the plea of insanity, as a lady who has been sixteen years an inmate of

a convent, has recently assured us is often the case with refractory *réligieuses*.*

It is not my purpose, however, to particularize results which I have no direct means of ascertaining. But of one thing, without any breach of charity, we may be assured, that the usurping church which arrogates to itself the sole possession of the true faith, and holds *any* and every means, even death itself, to be lawful for the extirpation of heresy, will not be likely to tolerate easily, or deal leniently with that heresy, when it exists in its own bosom; yea, even in an institution which is one of its own peculiar creations, and supposed to be one of the most guarded and sacred depositaries of the faith, whole and entire.

Rome lacks not means, even in this day, to deal with heretics, amongst whatever class, or in whatever connection they may be found. Nor, though the horrors of the Inquisition no longer exist, and the progress of enlightenment would not admit, even in Catholic countries, of such a tragedy as the massacre of St. Bartholomew, will it be slow to put down with a strong hand, however secretly, aught that opposes the onward progress of its chariot.

* See letter of "An English Clergyman," in the *Daily Telegraph* of January 17th, 1865.

We cannot examine the recesses, or unravel the secrets, of even English convents, on this our own free British soil. We have no license by law to do so. But is there not a strong presumption, amounting well nigh to certainty, that some of our dear countrywomen, victims to their own misplaced enthusiasm and misguided religious zeal, are at this very moment in the position of poor Cecile, or worse still, dragging on a degraded and miserable existence—the subjects of doubts and distress of the most poignant kind—their eyes opened too late to the nature of the system they have embraced, yet without sufficient courage to confess the truth and dare the unknown but dreaded issue?

Do I venture too far when I say "*It must be so*"?

It must be, inasmuch as it is *impossible* for those who have once been favoured with the light of God's Word and the Holy Spirit's teaching, to abide long undoubtingly and quiescently the dupes of the enslaving, debasing, soul-destroying errors which, sooner or later, they cannot help perceiving, vitiate the whole superstructure of Romanism, utterly undermining its integrity, and neutralizing the small modicum of truth which it still retains. What, then, can be done for these deceived and

misguided ones? Nothing. By the choice they have made they must abide, until the only deliverer which can relieve them shall arrive—death!

Whatever their conviction of error, whatever their emotions of regret, whatever pangs they are condemned to suffer mentally, or whatever amount of persecution they may have to undergo, no outward agency can mitigate their sufferings, no friendly voice speak the word of comfort, no human power burst the bonds of their prison-house and set the captives free. One rash but not sinful act, the result simply of youthful enthusiasm and mistaken religious zeal, has sealed for them a doom as dreary, and more irrevocable, than is awarded to many classes of criminals, convicted of deliberate breaches of the laws of God and man.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INSANE NUN.

In a neighbouring cell, safe under the restraint of bolts and bars, lies an insane nun. She is called Sister Veronica, and has numbered eight-and-twenty years. All weapons, by means of which she could possibly inflict injury on herself, have been carefully removed; and her power of volition having been so far restrained as to admit of her being left alone with safety, she is in solitude and darkness, like the other inmates of the convent at this hour. She moves uneasily on her pallet, as far as she has the ability to do so, and frequently moans piteously; while occasional gnashings of the teeth, distinctly audible, show the confirmed nature of the malady.

She has been a young woman of lively imagination and ardent temperament; by the former betrayed into believing the huge lie concerning the conventual paradise, and by the latter drawn

irremediably within the fatal snare. At the age of twenty she had pronounced the irrevocable vows; and while her enthusiasm lasted, which was from three to four years, had been as satisfied with her state as is usually found to be the case under similar circumstances. After this time, however, the charm was gradually unwound: the illusion by degrees had melted away, under the pressure of circumstances which every day became more fully apprehended and more intensely felt; and melancholy was the condition into which she had sunk, as the sorrowful conviction of the realities surrounding her settled hopelessly upon her spirit.

Deceived by her enthusiastic and mistaken fervour into believing that the future would be like the dream-like present, and never for a moment considering whereof she was made, how little she had understood the nature of the irreversible obligation she was contracting! Long indeed it was before she permitted herself to realize the utmost extent of her misery, even when forced partially into consciousness. It was too direful to be easily admitted, too sorrowful to be calmly contemplated. She had striven to keep up the illusion to the last. An unacknowledged fear for herself necessitated this, for hers was not a nature that could quietly pine away through

years of hopeless captivity, or calmly resign itself to a lingering, living death. The mind was too critically balanced for that. Absolute hopelessness, fixed despair, to her *could be* nothing less than the herald of the speedy loss of the heavenly Parent's glorious gift to his children—reason.

As from time to time, however, the drear blank of the years to come had presented itself before her, and she was constrained to estimate the sombre realities surrounding her, a dark forewarning had taken possession of her soul. Oh, how she had striven to close her eyes! how she had wrestled with her fearful apprehension! To no human sympathy could she appeal, for to no human ear did she dare to breathe the cause of her woe and dread.

Her confessor, in virtue of his office, could not but have censured; to the reverend mother's heart, on such a subject as this, she could not have hoped for access; with her sisters in religion she was forbidden by the rules of her order to have any particular friendships; to her kindred and the outer world she was dead for evermore.

In silence and loneliness, therefore, she had striven with her wretchedness, and with the worse forebodings which sat like an incubus on her soul, causing her at times to shrink away shuddering even from herself. When, however, conviction

as to the real character of the system to which she had vowed herself became permanently inwrought in her mind, and she could turn away her eyes from it no longer; when she felt, with all the intensity of which her nature was capable, that no human sympathy must ever brighten her sad heart, and that if her release from her vows would have saved her life, or her freedom even for a time have rescued her from the gripe of insanity, she could not have hoped for either;—then the mental powers gave way. Reason for a brief space tottered on her throne, and then her last glimmering ray was quenched in final darkness, and the sufferer sank in hopeless insanity—another of the countless victims to the anti-scriptural, anti-social, and unnatural system of monasticism in the Church of Rome.

It was that hopeless type called "melancholy madness." One idea haunted her continually: she had committed a fearful crime, and was in prison, surrounded by her gaolers. It was piteous to hear her incoherent but pathetic laments, and heart-reaching to listen to her entreaties for pardon and release. During the short interval which had intervened between the earliest intimations of approaching insanity, and the certain confirmation of the malady, her condition had been lamentable

in the extreme; the most unrelieved melancholy had constantly preyed upon her.

Her superiors had noticed this, and intuitively apprehended its cause. At first they had striven by argument and persuasion to reconcile her to her fate. When they perceived, however, that these means failed to bring about a salutary change, reproof, and a faithful setting before her the duties and obligations of her state, had been resorted to as the last chance of success. Alas! this had proved the culminating point of the evil. If the faintest beam of hope had at any time cheated her wretchedness—that *to save her* some mitigation of her sentence might be granted—this policy extinguished it; and from henceforth, dashed on the rocks of despair, she was involved in mental shipwreck.

To say that her superiors did not pity her, would be to libel them. Sympathy of such a sort as they *could* give was undoubtedly extended. But this was, as it ever must be, subservient to the remorseless system by which they were trammelled, and which prevented its extension beyond the limits prescribed by their laws and ordinances. In comparison with the infringement of these, happiness, reason, and life were "trifles light as air." If the vows taken by a *réligieuse* can be kept

consistently with happiness, reason, and life, good; but if not, then must happiness, reason, or life be sacrificed rather than the vow.

Unhappy Veronica! A ray of well-founded hope—a temporary release; even the genuine sympathy of one true heart, who understood her case, and could meet its demands, might have saved her. But as hopelessly immured, in fact, as the convict who in his cell awaits his doom, and far, far more effectually excluded from voluntary compassion than such an one—in lonely anguish, she drooped for a little moment within her cage, beating her weary wing in vain against its bars until, her tortured brain grown sick and dizzy, she fell—fell, alas! into that drear depth in which distorted images of woe supersede the present and the actual.

Her case soon became patent to all around her. No effort, indeed, could conceal the fact, though the cause was never hinted at, or permitted to be surmised. Of course, as soon as possible she was placed under restraint and surveillance, while arrangements were speedily made to convey her to the Hospital of St. J——, at B——, a continental asylum for insane patients.

On the evening succeeding that on which we have introduced her to the reader, two nuns, accompanied by her attendant and the mother

superioress, visit her cell. They proceed to dress her in secular attire, and the two sisters tell her they have come to take her with them to a nice convent a great way off, where she will be very happy. Her disordered imagination pictures that she is going to be taken to the place of punishment for the crime of which she fancies she is convicted. Terror takes possession of her; she rebels, and refuses to go. After a few moments spent in fruitless persuasion, they attempt to remove her by compulsion. She resists, screams, and struggles, while her piercing shrieks ring through the corridor.

Is that lady superioress a marble statue, that she stands so unmoved, as she contemplates the pitiable spectacle before her, and directs the proceedings? She knows full well what has produced this mental blight. Are those so-called sisters of this unfortunate being dead to all the feelings of humanity, that they proceed so callously to constrain her by actual force to submit to their will? for they, too, cannot but guess the reason of her fearful condition. Alas! all three are hardened by the necessities of the system to which they stand pledged.

That system is antagonistic to the laws of nature and the instincts of humanity; and when they became its devotees, they entered upon a life-

long warfare with these blessed laws and instincts. The process has done its work. They are not naturally more unfeeling than others, but their feelings have been repressed and blunted, and their finer susceptibilities deadened, by years of practical stoicism, and continuous effort to quench and exterminate every native sensibility and human emotion. So, resolutely suppressing within prescribed limits every impulse to pity, if any such arise, the only light in which they endeavour to regard the present transaction is that of work given them by the Church to accomplish, which it is their bounden duty to perform as faithfully and scrupulously as possible.

Hence the sad case and pitiful appeals of the poor demented one have no more chance of effectually touching their hearts, than they would have had of moving that of the Saint-Bishop himself, had he been present in person to superintend her removal.

Despite her frantic struggles and agonizing shrieks, she is seized by the two sisters and forcibly conveyed along the corridor to the door of the convent.

Here a conveyance awaits her, in which she is placed. Two sisters of charity, strangers, are within it to convey her to an institution of their

order several miles distant, where she may rest for the night ere she prosecutes her journey to the Continent. All the way she resists, screams, and entreats for release.

Arrived at the convent, the scene is renewed; and again on the morrow, when she takes her departure, in company with the sisters, for the steamboat. Her appeals are so piteous, and her cries so heartrending, that the idlers near the convent gates and the passers-by at the moment are moved to pity. When conveyed to the boat, her struggles again become so desperate, and her shrieks so loud and distressing, that the sisters endeavour to suppress the latter by main force, while they carry her by sheer strength from the cab to the vessel.

The answer to inquiries on all sides is that she is insane. The captain of the vessel, who, as in duty bound, questions the reason of this forcible conveyance, receives a reply to the same effect. All night long she raves piteously; but in British ears her cries shortly resound no longer.

The sisters of charity perform their work in conveying her to the asylum whither she is bound. Having accomplished it, they return to their convent in England. Their sole duty was to execute the

commission entrusted to them, without inquiry and without comment.

They never knew the reason of their prisoner's insanity, nor did any one outside the convent in which it originated. How could it be known elsewhere?

The incident which has supplied the groundwork for this sketch is too fresh in the minds of the public to require lengthened comment. One thing, however, must have been palpable to the minds of all who were acquainted with the inquiries it elicited at the time, and the explanations tendered in reply—viz., that the latter left the affair well nigh as much shrouded in mystery as it was before they were given. From first to last, as little real illumination was vouchsafed upon it by the Papal party as it was possible to convey.

It was a remarkable illustration of the policy pursued by the Church of Rome, which holds, that to no earthly tribunal is she bound to give an account of her deeds.

That the poor young lady was forcibly abducted from a certain conventual hospital here, and conveyed by main force to a vessel bound for a foreign shore, it was in vain to attempt to deny. The

questions which legitimately arose were these: Who was she, and where were her friends? whence was she brought, and what was her real condition?

To these inquiries the public obtained the following answers: — She was a nun, aged twenty-seven years, named Miss ——, and she was insane.

This was the actual substance of all the information tendered by her persecutors. What further light has been thrown upon the subject has been elicited by the untiring exertions of the friends of civil and religious liberty.

As these exertions have been instrumental in establishing the fact of her insanity, the inquiry arises, What was the cause of her insanity? Hereditary tendency, it is pleaded—there having been insanity in the young lady's family. Granting the plea, and allowing it all the weight to which it can lay claim, did it never occur to those who urge it that nothing would be more likely speedily and surely to develop the hereditary tendency than the unnatural, loveless, joyless, hopeless monotony of monastic life?

Would they wish to prepare inmates for a lunatic asylum, let them take as large a number as they can gather of certain fervid temperaments

and impassioned natures, and place them for life within the walls of a convent—hereditary tendency or no hereditary tendency, the experiment would perchance be more successful than they dream.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE POSTULANT'S DORMITORY.

THERE is another department of the convent which we will visit for a brief space: it is that devoted to postulants not yet "received" as novices. The sleeping-room is large, containing some sixteen beds. All these are occupied by inmates of the institution, with one exception—it is that of a young lady who has been received for a few days as a visitor.

For some time the light has been extinguished, and the occupants of the dormitory appear to have been sleeping. At length in the bed adjoining that of the youthful stranger, a low sob is heard. It is evidently not intended to attract attention, being as far as possible suppressed. The visitor, however, who is rendered somewhat wakeful by the novelty of her position, catches it instantly, and eagerly straining her ears to listen, becomes conscious that the person who uttered it

is undergoing suffering, either mental or physical; for emotion, which she cannot altogether restrain, is clearly audible.

Rising without an instant's hesitation, the young lady goes to her side, and inquires the reason of her distress. No answer is given in words; but the sobs become more frequent, accompanied by a sort of hysterical shiver, which plainly proves that the nervous system, from some unexplained cause, is painfully overwrought. Stealing to the bed of a postulant, who had been her personal friend before she entered the convent, the visitor arouses her, and brings her to the side of the young woman. One or two other sleepers quickly awake, and form a group round her bed, while the postulant strikes a light. Any satisfactory explanation of the cause of her distress, however, no inquiry can elicit. She continues to indulge in suppressed grief, and the involuntary shivering, which she cannot control, seems almost akin to convulsion.

Seen in the light of the lamp, the girl's face is more than commonly striking. If she has been nurtured in England, she evidently owns a more southern descent. Her black hair, large dark eyes, and rich olive complexion, proclaim that she is a native of a sunnier region, probably, poor

child, a stranger amongst strangers. The very cold of our northern island (more intensely felt owing to conventual rigour) might have *helped* to induce the class of symptoms present, although mental exercise had doubtless more to do with them.

Strongly moved to sympathy, the young lady who had first become aware of her condition, entreated the postulant before named to go to the nun who had charge of this department, and solicit help for the sufferer. After a little hesitation she went, and those assembled round the bed waited pityingly for her return. Meantime the girl's agitation did not seem to diminish, though she was assuredly very far from making a display of it.

At length the postulant returned, not, however, followed by the sister, or accompanied with means of relief. Her instructions were of a character which startled the visitor, all uninitiated as she was into the mysteries of conventual life. They were that the light be instantly extinguished, and each inmate of the dormitory retire at once to bed. In other words, that the poor girl was to be left, without further attempt at relief or sympathy, to darkness, solitude, and her own misery.

"And shall you obey?" involuntarily rose to the lips of the visitor.

"Of course," said the postulant, with an attempt at impenetrability of countenance, which was a slender veil to the feelings which she could not but entertain.

The young lady looked round. Not one there dared to indulge any thought but that of unqualified, unquestioning obedience. She gazed upon her friend with a strange mixture of feeling. She had hitherto known her as gentle and tender-hearted. Had conventual teaching really effected such a change as this? There was no doubt it was doing its best in that direction, for as the oldest there, she proceeded at once to extinguish the light, having first seen the others retire to their rest.

"Is this possible?" exclaimed the stranger, looking her wonder and indignation in a very unequivocal manner.

"I dare not disobey," she replied with a quiet steadfastness, which plainly intimated:—Everything under the sun must be sacrificed to obedience: this is the creed I am learning now, and feelings of every kind must be absolutely subservient to it.

"Then I am thankful I am not bound by your rules," cried the visitor, with a burst of feeling she could not repress. "I shall remain here."

As she spoke, she knelt down by the bedside of the sufferer, evidently prepared to remain there until she should see in her a change for the better.

For a few moments the postulant endeavoured to persuade her to submit to the mandate of the Superior, but in vain. Thoroughly roused by what appeared to her the unfeeling conduct exhibited, she rather rejoiced in having it in her power to testify her disapprobation of it, and continued kneeling in the position she had assumed long after the lights were put out, and all around seemed wrapped in repose. In whispered words of love and sympathy she strove to soothe the poor solitary one; nor did she leave her until her efforts were crowned with some measure of success.

The cause of her emotion, however, nothing could elicit. The kindly feeling was appreciated and reciprocated—that was unmistakable; but by whatever motive restrained, no words explanatory of her secret were spoken, and no hint given. Perhaps this was hardly likely to be done to a casual visitor, who had only just arrived; but the circumstance made an impression none the less deep that it remained a mystery; nor did the course pursued appear a whit the less inhuman that

all around were powerless to utter any protest against it, but rather, by silent participation, were obliged to appear to sanction it.

Who the poor southerner was, what had been her previous history, or whence she had been brought, the young lady had no means of ascertaining. Probably she was one of the many sacrificed to cupidity and selfishness by interested relations or guardians; or it might be that, friendless in the world, she had sought an asylum in this so-called religious house. Whatever her antecedents, however, surely in the sacred name of humanity, to say nothing of religion, some respect should have been paid to suffering, which was too genuine to have been mistaken, however unexplained its source.

Perhaps, however (and this is the most likely supposition), her Superiors knew well whence it originated. They had before seen the signs of inward grief, and were no strangers to its nature; but the victim was helpless in their hands, and the system teaches that, for the good of souls and the interests of the Church, all merely human feeling must be set at nought. This being the case, we can easily imagine on which side the Church's interests would be supposed to lie. Gladly, however, would we take the brighter side

of the picture, and hope that, still rich in earthly love and friends, escape to a less frigid region is yet possible for her.

However this may be, it does not alter the fact that the creed which can sanction such callousness to suffering, and hold up as a virtue the irrational obedience which must be practised at the expense of the purest natural sympathies and all human emotions, is a parody upon the character of Him whose holy name it drags into its unhallowed service—of Him who has deigned to make Himself known to his creatures by the sublime appellation of LOVE.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INFIRMARY—THE SICK SISTER.

In the infirmary of the convent lies a young nun slowly dying of consumption. Five years ago she too had been misled by the arrogant assumptions of the apostate Church, and shortly after had forsaken friends and home for the fancied heaven of conventual life.

Of a reasoning turn of mind, and early given to think and speculate freely and unadvisedly on those manifold questions in the economy of God's dealings with man, which are perplexing and obscure even to the most pious and learned; and to decide, alas! where human wisdom was never meant to decide, but to bow to revelation; she had heedlessly wandered into regions of doubt and scepticism, which it was easy to enter, but from which her own power could not extricate her. Utterly ignoring the fact of her own limited intelligence and narrow capacity, she had presumed to deal

with the Infinite as on equal grounds, and because she could not comprehend the why and the wherefore of all that on the surface appeared to present incongruity and inequality, had rashly rejected established belief as unworthy of credit.

In this purblind research into the domain which the Creator has reserved for Himself alone, even revealed truth itself had not escaped her shallow criticism. Much of the record of Himself and his ways, which God has given to his creatures, she could not bring into harmony with her own contracted views. Truth, in the aspect it wore in the religious world around her, was an especial stumbling-block. The differing opinions, how could she reconcile them?—the manifold inconsistencies, how explain or tolerate? Such strangely jarring elements! such dire confusion! Surely it was the darkness of chaos! She forgot that out of strangely jarring elements the great First Cause could educe order and beauty; that across the darkness of chaos He could throw light; and that all that appeared to her so incongruous and strangely conflicting was, *at the present moment*, light in Him.

In this drear and unhappy state of mind, without a centre on which to repose, her nature's need unmet, her heart's cravings unsupplied, she

had gone to hear a noted and eloquent lecturer on the principles and doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. It was a strangely tangible picture he had presented to her view, after the shadows and unrealities in which she had been living. Her attention was attracted. She went evening after evening, her interest continually increasing. If the representations given were true, there was yet a land of hope of which she had never dreamed—solid rock, after all, on which to rest her trembling foot. It was a fascinating idea, but she dared not trust it; she must make further investigation.

Books treating on the subject were eagerly procured. The "vision of delight" grew more and more attractive as she read. Imagination, of which she possessed a large share, was led captive by it. It seemed so adapted to poor fallen humanity; so fit a scheme to embody all the wants of the creature—present and palpable succour for human need. No walking forth *by faith* into a land of darkness—no taking the supply for the soul's necessities upon trust in the promise alone. She did not perceive that its matchless perfection marked its human origin. It was too perfect for sinful hands to work; they must infallibly deface and mar so fair and pretentious a design.

Captivated, however, as she was, she did not

start off at a tangent, to follow the *ignis fatuus.* She read on patiently and perseveringly—read often, with the Word of God in her hand, instituting research into its pages—read, above all, with prayer (she believed sincere) for Divine illumination; but she did not, during this process, turn aside carefully and *equally* to examine the reverse of the question. She thought she understood it. She mistook for knowledge the distorted view her "evil heart of unbelief" had supplied. She perceived not that her search into the Bible was made with a mind so biassed that the case was already prejudged. How then could her prayers, however she cheated herself with the belief of their sincerity, be crowned with an answer from the God of truth?

Though the result was longer in being arrived at than is commonly found to be the case, it was certain. While *not entertaining a doubt of the position she occupied,* she stood on the tempter's own ground, and, fatally, he "lured her with his radiant lie."

She became a member of the Roman Catholic Church. The consequences which followed were inevitable to one of her peculiar temperament. She was constrained to carry out her principles to their extremest issue—for her there could exist

no middle course. From a moody dreamer she emerged into an earnest, practical worker. All the advantages which the Church offered, and the rewards which she held out, were eagerly coveted by her. Every spot within the consecrated pale was hallowed ground; but there was a "holy of holies" after which her spirit yearned—"the cloistered convent's calm retreat," where, linked to the Divine by a bond as sublime as it was mysterious, and remote from the snares and tumult of the perilous and fretting world, she may pursue the secure and even tenor of her way. How little did the restless tide of humanity around her estimate the nature of the blessings they were spurning! From her elevated pinnacle she looked down with unspeakable pity upon those who were engaged in the ordinary routine of common life. She entered within the coveted enclosure, and became outwardly an unrepining and zealous devotee.

Whatever her emotions had been, she had carefully concealed them. If any apprehensions of mistake had striven for admission, she had earnestly resisted them. The unwonted physical hardships and austerities to which she had been subjected, however, had proved too trying for a constitution naturally delicate; and after months

of weakness and suffering, she was now laid upon the bed from which she was never to rise again, awaiting that solemn hour which was to be the test of her principles, and set at rest the question of truth or error for ever.

Peculiarly lingering had been her complaint, and many the hours of solitary communing she had passed with her own heart—shall we say with God? Prevented by her weakness from performing many of the duties practised by the other members of the community, and equally unable to attend to the multiplied formulas of devotion which at first she had assisted in with so much avidity, and which had been such a source of confidence, she was thrown back upon her own thoughts; and these oft-times had not been of the most soothing or comforting description.

She felt painfully now that she could *do* nothing, not even sometimes offer the most simple prayer with a collected mind; and as this conviction again and again forced itself upon her, it seemed as though her chief source of dependence had vanished; and there was a restless want within she knew not how to supply. She tried to believe what her spiritual guides told her, that Jesus was merciful and Mary all-powerful; that she had only to look to Mary. The "deadly doing" had taken

such firm hold of her mind, that she could not find comfort. Even the offering of her own sufferings to God, instead of the devotions to which she had been accustomed—to which she was exhorted—would not bring her the satisfaction she craved.

Her blessed and holy state as the bride of Christ was placed before her; and though in this thought she evidently found partial consolation, there was still a yearning void she could not fill, nor even rightly understand. She felt so helpless, so unworthy, so very, very weak, and so utterly unable to perform the smallest action aright, that it was almost overwhelming. Whither could she turn for comfort? how could her necessities be met?

In her most anxious moments reminiscences of earlier years would sometimes intrude, unwelcome visitants; and the voice of a good old pastor had once audibly repeated, "*My* grace is sufficient for thee, *my* strength is made perfect in weakness." But she had closed her ears, as though the tempter had whispered a suggestion, and turned away like one affrighted. As her strength decreased, however, and her craving desire for what she could nowhere find grew stronger upon her, these "tones of other hours" became more frequent, and *would* make themselves heard, whether she willed it or not.

She had been asleep for some time—the sweetest sleep she had known for many nights — daylight was just dawning in her room, when she awoke with the dying words of a beloved sister, who had passed away years before, ringing in her ears: "Christ all in all! Christ all in all!" They were her sister's very accents, too—how well remembered, though so long hushed for ever. She half rose up in bed to listen. She could not command *these* tones away, she did not try; but, completely overcome, fell back upon her pillow and wept.

Yet she dared not give the rein to thought. A partial glimpse, a half-formed picture of things long since forgotten, intruded upon her mental vision. She shrank back in dismay, and tried to shut it out, for she feared to entertain it. But the calm, sweet face of the departing one was in the foreground, and, blending with this, the form of a revered mother who now was sleeping in Jesus, a noble father's image, and a gentle sister who had wept bitter tears at her departure from home; and it was more than mortal could do, in such an hour of weakness, to steel her heart against its power.

"Oh, if *that* death-scene *should* be right, and *this* all wrong! If the past five years *should be*, after all, one hideous dream." The thought was

horrible. "Christ all in all," she slowly repeated. "'*Christ* all in all.' Mary said it; mother said it. *If* it be so, where and what am I?"

A vague expression of dread and apprehension chased away the tears. "Oh that I could see Eleanor!" she exclaimed, half aloud; "my sweet, sweet sister Eleanor!"

She lay for an hour longer, her thoughts drifting hither and thither in strange and painful disorder; but ever and anon they resolved themselves into one intense and burning wish, such as only one in her state can know, which manifested itself in a low wail for Eleanor. A special request brought the Superioress, at a comparatively early hour, to her bedside.

"Reverend mother, would it be possible for me to see my sister Eleanor?"

"My child, I thought you fully understood the rules of our holy order. No secular person can be admitted to the chamber of a consecrated nun."

"I know it, reverend mother; but I believe I am drawing nigh to death, and I do *so long* to see her face once more, and hear her loved voice speak to me."

"My child," replied the Superioress gravely, "these are thoughts which do not become the bride of Christ at such an hour as this. You should

now, more than ever, endeavour to forget all earthly ties; so shall you become dearer to Him whom you are so soon to meet."

What was it that jarred so intensely upon the sensibilities of the poor sufferer, that seemed so much like solemn mockery? She only felt the effects, she did not *see* quite clearly enough to analyze the cause; nevertheless, it was not difficult of solution. She replied, almost with an appearance of irritation,

"I have tried, how long and earnestly God knows. I have no other earthly wish remaining. If I could only see my sister, I could die happy."

"Your case is, indeed, a pitiable one, to have your mind so filled with earthly affections, when the King, your spouse, should be alone the object of your love and desire."

"Perhaps it is my disease; but I cannot help it. It is my last wish. Oh, if I could *but* see her, if only for a moment."

"Perhaps it *is* disease," said the lady, soothingly. "Let us hope so. You would not willingly grieve your heavenly Bridegroom, I am sure. I will send your confessor presently."

The poor nun hardly heard her, but as she left the room murmured, or rather moaned, well nigh audibly,

"If I could only see her, *to tell me which is right.*" Then, unconsciously taking up the words of Scripture learned years ago, she added, "Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me."

Two hours later, Eleanor called at the convent to inquire after her sister. She was told that she was evidently gradually sinking.

"May I not see her?" she inquired, in tremulous accents.

"I regret very much to say that it is against the rules of our holy order to admit relatives into the sleeping apartment of a *réligieuse*," said the Superioress.

"But if my sister is so near her end, could not this favour be granted as a special act of kindness? She was my only sister, you know," she added, entreatingly.

The lady cast down her eyes, for she could not meet the appealing look which was raised to her face.

"I am very sorry that I cannot grant your request. I am absolutely bound by the rules of our order, you know."

A tear fell from Eleanor's eye.

"Oh, if you knew what the loss of my sister has cost me," she exclaimed, pathetically; "and

now to be refused the consolation of even a last farewell, of one parting word; it is hard!"

"I feel the painful necessity as deeply as you do, my dear young lady. But, believe me, it is *better* that the last hours of a *réligieuse* should be kept free from all thoughts of the world and worldly associations."

"The world and worldly associations!" replied Eleanor, whose rising indignation could now with difficulty be repressed. "I am her sister—her own blood and kindred, nourished at the same breast, brought up in the same home, never, until she entered these walls, separated from her. Does your creed teach you to call the ties *God* has formed, 'the world and worldly associations'?"

"When we become consecrated to God," replied her auditor, with unruffled composure, "we forswear all merely natural ties; *for us* they exist no longer. Having been so happy as to receive a call to become the affianced spouse of our Lord and Saviour, we leave all for his sake. The house of our consecration is henceforth our sanctuary, and we become, as it were, dead to all outside the convent walls. Alas! you know not the blessedness of so high and holy a calling. Would, my dear young lady, that you were privileged to do so."

Eleanor's bosom heaved, and her eye flashed;

but she still kept in check the gathering storm. She desired at least to get all the intelligence she could regarding her sister, if she might not see her.

The lady was aware somewhat of the impression her words had made, though she had not looked her listener at all steadily in the face while she was speaking. She was, therefore, glad when Eleanor asked, in a quiet voice, "How long does the medical man think my poor sister is likely to last?"

"It is impossible to say, the complaint is so deceptive. She may linger for some time, or be gone very quickly."

"Will you answer me one question sincerely?"

"Certainly; any question you like to ask."

"Does Millicent ever mention me?"

Oh, how much was involved in the answer to this! The lady saw it in the touchingly anxious look which dwelt upon the speaker's face. Nevertheless she answered evasively. How could she do otherwise, for the sake of the system she was pledged to uphold, as well as for that of her who so eagerly waited for her words?

"She has named you, certainly, in the course of the last fortnight, since she has been so much worse; but, as I said before, a *réligieuse* in all

circumstances is bound to endeavour to forget relations; how much more in hers now!"

"Has she ever expressed a wish to see me?" pursued Eleanor, earnestly.

The Superioress winced.

"Something to that effect she certainly said once, but it was possibly the effect of a little wandering of the mind. When mistress of herself she could never express such a wish, because she knows it is as wrong as it is impossible."

"One more word. Tell me, oh! tell me, is she satisfied with the state she has embraced?"

It was an unwise question; but who at such an hour and under such pressure of feeling might not have forgotten the line of mere policy?

The Superioress drew herself up. "A *réligieuse* must ever be satisfied with the state she has embraced; but most of all when she comes to die."

Poor Eleanor! Despair seized upon her. She could question no longer. It seemed hopeless to attempt to extort anything satisfactory from such a source.

"Then your answer is positive. I cannot see her?"

"I regret sincerely to be compelled to say that you cannot."

"Will you give my love to her," she asked, with a quivering lip, "and tell her I hope through the merits of *Jesus*, to meet her in heaven?"

There was a peculiar expression about the lady's face; but she forbore comment, and merely replied in the affirmative.

Eleanor rose to go. She could not speak; but drawing her veil over her face, left in tears.

It would be wronging the Superioress to say that she did not sympathize to some extent with the grief of the poor young lady. She did, for she was not yet quite dead to all the feelings of humanity, stern as was the necessity which continually forced her to act as though she were. But her principles constrained her to regard all such emotions as criminal weakness, and bound her to repress them with a strong hand.

Her position was one hardening in its nature and tendency. Any infringement of discipline, however seemingly justifiable, it was impossible for her to allow; indeed, in those beneath her command, she was compelled to punish it severely. In all such matters, to use the words of the saint and bishop before quoted, she was exhorted to have *a heart of bronze*.* The rising feeling of compassion for Eleanor was, therefore, religiously

* St. Alphonsus Liguori. See "The Nun Sanctified."

suppressed, or rather, merged in the ever present and all-absorbing ones of personal duty and the interests of the Church.

Throughout the whole of the day, the dying nun tossed restlessly on her pillow. As her mental view grew clearer and more intensified in the light of the coming eternity, so did the darkness around her become more dense and appalling. There was no anchor of safety for her when the billows on the unknown shores of the future should break across her disembodied, trembling spirit. Awestruck, she scarce knew why, she trembled to pronounce the name of the Virgin Mary. "And to which of the saints wilt thou turn?" again and again, in the inspired language of the Scripture she had cast aside, sounded in her ears. Her *state* as a ground of hope, the last sacraments, all appeared equally unsatisfactory, while the fair superstructure of her good works, which she had been rearing with such zealous care, seemed only as a foundation of shifting sand. She moaned uneasily, and ever and anon cast her hopeless eyes to heaven; but there was no answering look of pity to her mute, despairing appeal. The Saviour, who had supported the long-lost Mary in the dark valley and shadow of death, appeared at such an awful distance. *She had placed Him there;* she dared not

turn her glance towards Him. No earthly comforter was near; the only human face she saw was that of the infirmarian, and how to her could she breathe a word of the doubts which were racking her bosom, of the dread thoughts which were oppressing her? One yearning passionate cry was in her heart; but how could her pale lips give it utterance, except in the low moan, or indistinctly murmured name of Eleanor?

On retiring to rest, the Superioress visited her again; and after the usual salutations, inquired if she was now more satisfied, alluding to the visit her confessor had made in the morning. For some moments she did not reply, but closed her eyes to keep back the signs of inexpressible emotion which were fast gathering in them. At length, on a repetition of the question, as though by an effort summoning strength, in a broken, tremulous voice, she said—

"If I could see my sister for one little moment, only one, I should die in peace."

"My dear child, such a persistence in an unlawful wish, at this solemn hour, grieves as much as it surprises me. For the love of your soul, turn your thoughts away from earth to your heavenly Bridegroom, whom you are so soon to meet."

"*Is* He my Bridegroom?" said the sufferer, with a shudder. "My mind is all chaos. Oh for some one to tell me, to show me!"

"What words are these, my daughter? Are you not a child of the Holy Catholic Church, taught and guided by her infallible authority? Did not a conviction of her power, and hers alone, to teach you, lead you within her pale? Have you not, up to the present moment, led the most blessed life that mortal can lead within her bosom? Take care how, at the last, you suffer the enemy, by evil and heretical suggestions, to prevail, and disturb your tranquillity. Dear as you are to your heavenly Spouse, you could not more certainly provoke his displeasure."

A spasm as of agony passed over the countenance of her listener, but no further word escaped her lips. The Superioress continued, in a softened voice,

"Fly to the protection of the holy mother of God, poor tempted one. She is omnipotent with her Son, and will assuredly deliver you from the perils which encompass you. Only trust her."

The dying young woman turned her face to the wall; intense exhaustion seemed to steal over her. The Superioress strove once more to elicit some

expression of her feelings; but failing in the attempt, withdrew in silence.

A brief calm succeeded, during which the sufferer appeared to sleep. The temporary lull passed, however, and rest was obtained only at broken intervals; but, sleeping or waking, the mind's burden was the same, and the name of Eleanor strangely intermingled with that of Jesus.

Over the final issue we must draw the veil. That in isolated misery she must languish, until death closes the scene, we know; but further we cannot portray it. The only ray of light we can evoke, to soften the gloom of the picture, is in the blessed knowledge that she is in the hand of Him who is merciful as well as just. From the noon-day radiance of his Divine teaching she had wandered into the densely dreary by-path of Romanistic error. Let us try, at least, to indulge the hope, however, that in the depths of her prison-house, at this eleventh hour, the Good Shepherd was still seeking his long-lost wanderer; and that, though bitterness and anguish may surround her death-bed, as the fruit of the seed she has sown, she yet may be found to have been saved "so as by fire."

Her mourning sister wept tears such as only

anguish so intense could weep, while, in the language of the inspired Psalmist, she prayed—"Oh, deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove unto the multitude of the wicked. Have respect unto the covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty."

In "The Daily Telegraph," of Nov. 21st, 1864, there appeared a letter bearing the signature of "Z.," in which it was stated that there was then a young lady, aged about twenty-five, who had become a nun, dying in decline in the convent at Hastings. In this her last sickness, her sisters (all Roman Catholics) were denied access to her, under a regulation propounded by the Lady Superior, that no secular person could be admitted into the bedroom of a nun.

When such a circumstance occurs at our own doors, repulsive as it is to the instincts of nature and the laws of the Creator, it comes home to our hearts. *This* case, to us as Protestants, had a peculiar interest. The young lady was a pervert. Very possibly, indeed most probably, if ever she had possessed true light at all, her conscience was not altogether without its misgivings. If so—if even one shade of doubt or disquiet were experienced, what a fearful thought that she must die

with it unexpressed, and lie down in hopeless sorrow amidst "the sparks" with which, in her blind enthusiasm, she had vainly compassed herself. The *human* aspect of the question, in comparison with this, dwindles into insignificance.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DYING NUN.

In another department of the infirmary, nearly adjoining that of the sister last named, lies an aged nun. She too is sick, and evidently drawing near the final hour. She does not seem to suffer pain, but is restless and uneasy, frequently muttering, and again breaking out into audible ejaculations, as though a prey to mental disquiet.

"These years of suffering," she murmurs, "have they all been in vain? Mother of mercy, save me!" Then at intervals, "No bad confessions—worthy communions—all the penance my weak body would permit—yet no satisfaction. No certainty. All dark—all dark! Santa Teresa, *ora pro me.*" A long pause succeeds, during which she seems to slumber. Then with strange energy she ejaculates, throwing up her arms, as though groping for something beyond her reach,

"Light! light! Jesu and Mary! send light in this midnight hour."

Softly the infirmarian approaches, and asks her if she would like to see her confessor.

"No! I have nothing to confess. He knows all. I want light in this dread hour. He cannot give me that!"

"Yes, yes, he can," said the sister. "He can again pronounce the absolution, and administer to you the most holy viaticum. That always brings comfort."

She did not seem to heed.

"So many confessions! so many communions! So much penance and self-denial! Life a dreary blank! Yet no hope now!"

"Yes, there is hope," replied her would-be comforter. "After all you have done and suffered your purgatory cannot be a long one."

"Purgatory, purgatory! So worn and weary here with suffering. Horrible!"

"The most holy sacrifice will be offered for you, and the community will pray continually. God is merciful, and Jesus and Mary all powerful. Take comfort."

"Is God merciful? Are Jesus and Mary all powerful? Why then this thick, thick gloom?"

"It is the temptation of the devil, Clotilde.

Can you doubt the mercy of God, when He has given Jesus as our Saviour, and Mary as our advocate? Look to Mary! You have been her child through life. She will not fail you in the hour of death."

"*She does,*" said the dying nun, with mournful deliberateness. "I have looked, and looked in vain for help. I have reminded her of my prayers and life-long devotion to her. But not one smile does she vouchsafe to cheer me in this dreadful hour."

"It is the trial of your faith. Still look—never cease looking; she cannot fail you at length. It is impossible."

With a glance of hopeless anguish she turned her face to the wall. Oh, was there no voice there to whisper ere too late, "Look unto *Me* and be saved"?

For an hour she remained silent, and the infirmarian supposing her to be sleeping, lay down on her own pallet. The painfully agitated mind, however, soon rose above the weakness of the sinking frame. In thrilling accents she exclaimed, "*Suppose* it should be delusion! suppose all I have done and suffered is in vain!" Then, as if, though so late, the robe of self-righteousness was beginning to fall off, the refuge of lies to be swept away, she continued, "And all has been so mixed, so defiled.

I am so unworthy. O God, have mercy upon me! Jesus and Mary, save me or I am lost!"

In that moment of awakening spiritual perception, when just entering, alone and unaided, the dark valley of the shadow of death, it was an awful thing to gaze upon her; for the terror and despair which held possession of her soul, spoke out in every lineament of her agonized countenance. As earth was receding, and the gloom of the drear unknown region to which she was drawing near gathered more darkly around her, the startling conviction forced itself upon her, that the bed on which she had been all her life reposing, was "shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it," the covering she had been throwing around her, "narrower than that he can wrap himself in it."* And as her trembling spirit's sole resource was thus swept away for ever, no beam of hope appeared in the dire extremity, to give the faintest promise of any other ground of security and rest.

With a look of unearthly meaning, her eyes peered into space, as though seeking some vision to reassure her. Then in a voice in which despair and anguish were preternaturally intermingled, she cried, "Where! where shall I go? What shall I do?"

* Isa. xxviii. 20.

Poor, poor, deceived, misguided one! You call in vain. For not in all this house of vaunted dedication to Jesus, is there one who in this decisive and tremendous hour could simply and believingly say, "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world."

The cry arouses the infirmarian, and she quickly approaches the bed. "What did you ask for, Sister Clotilde?" She had been partially slumbering, and had thought she cried out for something.

"Salvation! life!" said the dying nun, in tones her hearer never forgot. "I am dying—lost."

The sister—blunted as her faculties were by the debasing chain of bondage, mental as well as physical, which she had worn so long, and compelled as she had long been by the system which enthralled her, to repress every warmer feeling of emotion, much less the manifestation thereof—trembled she scarce knew why, and let fall a tear.

"Fly to the mother of mercy. She is your life, and 'the health of the sick.' Shall I recite her Litany by you?"

"No! no! It is *assurance* of salvation I want. She cannot give me that. I am a lost sinner. She cannot save me."

"She is 'the refuge of sinners,' Clotilde. It is sin to doubt what the church teaches."

"I do not. But I am so vile. All is so unholy. I want to be made pure."

"She is holy and immaculate. She will commend you to her Son. Think how many saints have been saved through her intercession."

"True, true; but they were holy and I am vile."

"You reproach yourself too much, Clotilde. You have edified us all I am sure, and ever since your profession have done all you could to ensure salvation."

"Hush! hush! I entreat you. I used to think so too. But it won't do *now*."

"Why not, if it is true?"

"I am dying, Marguerite. If you knew *how everything* appears in the light of eternity—how sullied, how evil! Not one pure action all my life long; not one truly good thought. Do not mock me with praise."

Darkened as her own mind was by the self-righteous delusion which the clear light of eternity was so swiftly dissipating from the mental vision of her dying sister, she could not fully comprehend her. But thinking her mind was wandering, she replied, soothingly—

"I will repeat the Litany of our Lady. She

is omnipotent with her Son, and none ever died in darkness who trusted in her."

Clotilde only moaned, as the rapid voice commenced in the tone, not of heartfelt supplication, but of formal worship, "We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God; despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O ever glorious and blessed Virgin!" Nor was there one audible response to the long train of blasphemous invocation which followed.

At length having gone through the reiterated formula, much in the manner of a school-girl repeating a task, the poor benighted Marguerite paused, literally glad to take breath, and asked her auditor if now she was more satisfied. A deep groan followed the question; and fixing her eyes on the speaker, she said in a hollow voice, "You do not know what it is to die."

Half terrified, and not knowing how to reply, she proposed calling for the priest.

"Not now. I have confessed. He cannot tell me where I am going."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Marguerite, half turning away her head, as though wishing to escape listening to the wild impiety of Clotilde. "You are not right. I am sure your mind is wandering. I *must* fetch Father Wilfrid or our reverend

Mother." Then more softly, "Perhaps the last sacraments will comfort you."

"Can they *save* me?" responded the sufferer, whose conscience was now painfully awakened to her real state as a helpless, undone sinner.

"It is sacrilegious to doubt it. What can any *réligieuse* want more, who has lived edifyingly up to her rule, than to receive the last rites of the Church?"

"Let me sleep now, and in the morning summon Father Wilfrid. I am better. I should fear for you to disturb him."

Listening to the last argument, though but half convinced she was doing right, Marguerite yielded, and soon forgot her charge and her fears in slumber.

Not so the recently spiritually-awakened one. Tossing wildly to and fro in feverish restlessness, she vainly strove to tranquillize her conscience, and still the war within. With a feeling of increasing mental darkness and deeper spiritual distress she at length almost welcomed the arrival of her confessor, whom Marguerite, despite her former denials, summoned to her couch at the break of day. He approached, and bending over her, asked in a whispered voice what troubled her.

"All is so dark. I am so vile; every action of

my life has been so defiled. Father, what shall I do ?"

"Your confessions have been sincere ?"

"Yes."

"Your communions *worthy ?*"

The meaning of that word to the dying woman was deeper and more significant than it had ever been before.

She hesitated. "They have never been sacrilegious, father. I have meant them to be good."

"Enough. And you have not wilfully broken monastic rule, or knowingly disobeyed Superiors ?"

"Never, I believe."

"And you have forsaken all for our Lord Jesus Christ, and been devout to the Blessed Virgin and your patron saint ?"

"I have endeavoured to do all this."

"Why, then, this uneasiness, my daughter ? Are you not the Bride of Christ ?"

"I have been called so ; but I cannot realize it. All seems so guilty, so impure."

"That is true. After we have done all, we are unprofitable servants. To a certain extent this feeling is wholesome ; but you must not let the devil take hold of it to torment you. Your heavenly Bridegroom looks with complacency

upon you, pities your failings, and as his faithful bride you can never be lost."

She seemed to cling to the momentary gleam of hope the last assurance afforded her, like a drowning man would catch at a straw. For an instant her face lighted up with an expression of relieved thankfulness; the next it relapsed into one of anxious despondency, and fixing her eyes on the priest with a look of such intense solicitude as only the time, the nature of the question, and the tremendous issues depending on it could elicit, she asked, in a voice of trembling eagerness.

"But if saved, shall I not have a long, long purgatory?"

The answer was a soothing one; mark it!

"I would fain hope not, my child. Your present contrite and humble dispositions afford good ground for hope, if they are not proof presumptive, that in your case a long purgatorial process will not be necessary. Instead of harassing yourself with this question, with which you have nothing to do, rather thank your heavenly Bridegroom that He has deigned to bestow upon you such encouraging sentiments of sincere humility and compunction. It is a proof of his goodwill towards you, and an evident token that He would not have you long separated from Himself."

Once more this illusive reasoning seemed to impart consolation to the troubled mind. Rather should we not say, it was an opiate deadly in its character, calculated to lull the partially awakened conscience into that fatal sleep, from which it was only possible to awake when awakening was for ever too late. Miserable teacher! poor deluded victim! God help you both!

Lulled to temporary security, she passed the day in sleep. It was the torpor which precedes dissolution. In the evening the priest was again summoned to her side, to complete his work of spiritual deception. She had revived somewhat, and strove to speak, but the effort was fruitless; and, *supposing* her confession, the last rites of the Church were administered. Throughout the unmeaning and tedious ceremony, the dying eyes followed the officiator with an intense and eager gaze. She never took them off; and when he had concluded, those eyes still continued, with a look of unspeakable, unearthly meaning, riveted upon him. There were doubt, distress, inquiry, such as only one dying in darkness could feel, all mingled in the fearful expression; and he felt as he had not often felt beneath its power.

He bent over her. She strove again to speak. He strained his ear to catch the words. They

came gaspingly, and in broken utterance: "Where —am I—going?"

The deceiver trembled. He had no words; he needed none. The spirit, while he searched in vain for reply, took its flight to that terrible unknown—Where?

Answer *thou*, blind guide, false teacher. But while thou seekest for reply, listen to the words of Him whose place, and power, and attributes thou dost so awfully and fatally usurp: "If the blind lead the blind, shall not both fall into the ditch?"

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

With the inexpressibly momentous words of our blessed and Divine teacher, quoted at the close of the last chapter, I conclude my delineations of the *romance* and *reality* of convent life.

Dear reader, as you have perused them, has any sentiment therein expressed, or any truth set forth, struck a chord within your own bosom, revealing a likeness to yourself hitherto unsuspected? If so, be warned in time, lest the resemblance, thus detected in its earliest phases, become in its after developments stereotyped and perfected.

Though put forth under the guise of fiction, because I thought it best calculated to accomplish my purpose, which was that of illustrating the *heart workings* of the system of conventualism, my portraitures, as stated in my preface, are far from being the offspring of imagination merely. They are largely indebted to my own personal experience,

as well as to other manifold sources of reliable information. But were this not the case, on the sure ground of our common and universal sympathies, I again affirm that their truthfulness can admit of no question, inasmuch as such experience is, and *must be*, an ever-recurring accompaniment of the system.

That some who peruse my pages may, nevertheless, be disposed to scruple at my having assumed this guise, I am prepared to expect. To such I would venture a word of explanation. On such a subject *much must be* left to imagination. The very nature of the system makes this a necessity, inasmuch as it precludes all possibility of *observation of its interior workings*. It is one of barred doors and sworn secresy, from the meanest agent in the charmed circle up to the spiritual despot who holds absolute and unlimited sway within it. No one is ever permitted to intrude into its sanctum, or to hold unrestricted converse with its votaries. British law, even as it at present exists, has no power to step in and inspect the condition, or secure the rights of its immured victims. Once within the relentless walls, and no human eye can gaze upon their distress, no human heart sympathize, no human agency interpose to unlock the prison doors and set the captives free. Such being

the case, what possibility can there be of arriving at the secrets of their inner life and heart experience, except through the scanty medium of such isolated facts as occasionally, by God's mercy, are permitted to reach us, and the inferences derivable from the consideration of the laws of our common nature, and the sympathies which alike govern every human being?

"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man,"* said the inspired Solomon a thousand years before Christ. Human nature has not changed since his time. It is still the same in every age and country; neither circumstances nor condition can alter its universal development. The responsive human heart still answers to the same key-notes all the world over. Certain causes ever produce the same results in one human being as in another. What would affect my sensibilities will affect those of the cloistered nun in her cell. What would appeal to my sympathies would indubitably appeal to hers also. She did not change her nature when outwardly she took leave of the world. She did not annihilate all human affections when she put off her secular garb, and assumed that of a *réligieuse*. She did not become dead to every natural impulse when she pronounced the vows of poverty, chastity,

* Proverbs xxvii. 19.

and obedience. She then merely commenced a life of unnatural warfare against all that was human —of outward repression of the heaven-bestowed instincts, never to be repressed or destroyed— never, *because the contest is with Him who made her, and who will not mar his finished work.*

If then, in all that appertains to our common nature we are still identical, and she immured in a dreary prison cannot escape to reveal her emotions, can I be wrong in attempting to portray from analogy, even if destitute of other ground, the *inevitable results* of the system to which she is a bond slave, when such portrayal must ever fall far short of the harrowing truth.

Here, however, I may remark, that I am not, of course, ignoring the fact that nuns do sometimes escape to reveal the secrets of convents. My own experience is proof, however limited, that escape is possible.* "The Narrative of Josephine M. Bunkley," and later, "The Memoirs of the Princess Caracciola," ex-Benedictine nun, testify to the same fact. They also incontrovertibly prove, however, that such escape is exceptional, and only to be accomplished in the face of difficulties which hardly one in a thousand would have the courage to surmount.

* "Personal Experience of Roman Catholicism." By Mrs. Richardson. With Preface by Rev. C. B. Tayler, M.A.

If this be the case in convents of the very highest rank, such as that in which the Princess was professed (*which are quite exceptional*), and in those of the Sisters of Charity, to which Miss Bunkley belonged, who are *comparatively free*, what must be the position of the poor recluses in cloistered convents of strict observance?

If you wish for the testimony of the highest authority upon the point, listen to that of St. Alphonsus Liguori and St. Francis de Sales, both bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. It is taken from "The Nun Sanctified," a book written expressly for the *réligieuses* by the former saint, whose entire writings have been pronounced by the sacred Congregation of Rites to contain *nothing* worthy of censure. The extract is made from an edition published at Dublin in the year 1844, for the use of English nuns, etc.

"To be a good *réligieuse*, and to be content, are one and the same thing. . . . . I have been accustomed to say that a *réligieuse* in her convent enjoys a foretaste of paradise, or *suffers an anticipation of hell.* To endure the pains of hell, is to be separated from God; to be forced against the inclinations of nature to do the will of others; to be distrusted, despised, reproved, and *chastised* by those with whom we live; *to be shut up in a place*

of confinement from which it is impossible to escape; in a word, it is to be in continual torture, without a moment's peace."

In a chapter addressed to a person "who finds that she has become a nun against her inclination," he says, "I now see you placed in the house of God, and made (either voluntarily or *unwillingly*) the spouse of Jesus Christ. For my part, I cannot pity you more than I could pity a person who had been transported (even against his will) from a place infected with pestilence, and surrounded by enemies, to a healthful country, to be placed *there for life*, secure against every foe. I add: grant that what you say is true: now that you are professed in a convent, and *that it is impossible for you to leave it*, tell me what do you wish to do? If you have entered religion against your inclinations, *you must now remain with cheerfulness.* If you abandon yourself to melancholy, you shall lead a life of misery, and will expose yourself to great danger of suffering *a hell here, and another hereafter. You must then make a virtue of necessity.* And if the devil has brought you into religion, for your destruction, let it be your care to avail yourself of your holy state for your salvation, and to become a saint."

Being asked his opinion regarding a person

who had become a nun against her will, St. Francis de Sales answered, "It is true that this child, if she had not been obliged by her parents, would not have left the world; but this is of little importance, provided she knows that the *force* employed by her parents is more useful to her than the permission to follow her own will. For now she can say: *If I had not lost such liberty, I would have lost true liberty.*"

Such testimony as this from two bishops of the Roman Church, and canonized saints to boot, is worth a thousand asseverations made to suit times and circumstances, because it proves the real teaching of the Church on the point.

After reading this, let me ask my readers to place themselves, as far as it is possible, in the condition of these miserable votaries of a false creed, and to endeavour to realize to its *fullest extent* the dreary and hopeless position in which they stand, and then to pronounce whether it is not the part of charity to employ all means that are expedient and lawful to pluck unwary feet out of the snare, and rescue those whose happiness perchance is dear to us as our own from a fate so revolting and sorrowful.

I speak of that I—in some measure—know, and testify of that I have felt. And though,

through Divine mercy, I was extricated ere I had taken the fatal vows, a vivid remembrance yet remains, of the anticipatory distress and dread I experienced, regarding the life I had in ignorance sought to embrace. A severe illness, in an early stage of my career, brought home with a force from which there was no appeal, the convictions which had been slowly gathering from the first hour I had set foot within that continental convent. Omnipotent power and love compassed my rescue; but I here record my deliberate belief that had the revulsion, which providentially occurred in my feelings before I took the final step, ensued too late to remedy the evil, loss of reason, or a *living death*, from the thought of which I even now shrink back shuddering, *must* have been the result.

It is then with a heart which enters into all the minutiæ of the suffering of these misguided ones, that I have ventured to illustrate—in a manner which, as before intimated, appeared to me *most* likely to appeal to those who would be *most in* danger—the different phases of the serpent snare.

It is a subject of vital import to every father, mother, and daughter in this our free country; yea, to every Englishman and Englishwoman. There are at this moment innocent and noble-minded young

women slowly pining life away, the victims of unmitigated regret and unalleviated anguish, in these so-called abodes of happiness and heaven. They would communicate with the outer world if it were possible; they would escape if it were in their power; but on the prison door is written, "No egress," and on the prisoners' hearts, "No hope." In a moment of youthful enthusiasm, they made their choice, and they must abide by it till they change the convent cell for their last narrow home.

The heart may ache to breaking, the mind may brood in tortured despair until reason totters on her throne. What recks it? The *bride of heaven* must not forswear her vows. There is no ear to listen to her tale of woe, no heart to pity, no hand to save.

English father, would you like to see your young and guileless daughter consigned to such an appalling doom? English mother, who cradled that dear girl in your arms, and pillowed her golden head on your bosom, could you consign her to such a loveless, hopeless, destiny? Could you bear the intensely saddening thought, that in the hour of sickness and death, she must never hover round your bed, never minister to your wants, or help to soothe your dying agony! Yea, that you

must not even once gaze on her familiar face? If not, guard her well, for the enemy is at your door.

Child of tenderness and hope, whose pathway has been hitherto one track of sunshine, and into whose bright home no care has ever been permitted to intrude; who hast hardly known a want unfulfilled, a wish ungratified, could you endure the dreary monotony, the joyless, aimless existence, the living death I have faintly depicted in the foregoing pages? Could you bear the thought that in the hour of dissolution, should it arrive first to you, no mother's voice must comfort you, no sister's face must smile upon you, no father's presence cheer and strengthen you; not one faint echo of the tones familiar to you from childhood, not one glimpse of the dear forms that have ever blessed your earthly home, must be permitted to irradiate the gloom of that dark convent cell?

If not, take care! Oh, take care! Your unwary feet are entering the enchanted ground. That almost unearthly music, that rare architecture, those glorious paintings, those clouds of fragrant incense, are all parts of the illusion which will surely enthral you, if you venture further within the mystic circle. The fatal influence is all around you; it permeates the very air you breathe; you

cannot escape its potent witchery. You will fall asleep—such a secure sleep! and dream—such fatal dreams! Darkness will appear light, and falsehood truth. The convent will take the guise of a celestial temple; the convent life one of heaven begun below. Make not one step further, or the charm may work so potently that you will slumber on until you awake too late to find the airy phantoms dispelled by a reality more sombre than your imagination can conceive of now. Be warned in time. You are no match for the subtlety which will be arrayed against you; you cannot estimate its power. Your simplicity and inexperience cannot cope with sophistry and guile. If you proceed, you will be entangled like a helpless bird in the net of the fowler, and to be entangled *is to be lost.*

But there is another aspect of the question beside that of the perverted one's personal suffering in this life: it is the soul-destroying departure from truth, which must hopelessly wreck the interests of the immortal spirit throughout eternity; and this is after all by far the most deplorable one.

The subject of Romanistic errors in all their length and breadth, is too wide and vast to enter upon here. I allude now more especially to the

egregious fallacy which has in all ages peopled convents, and which is still the main bulwark of the conventual system. It is this, that the convent is in fact the vestibule of heaven upon earth, and the nun the chosen bride of Christ. With this doctrine the mind is early imbued by such narratives as the following, which is a specimen selected from others, because it bears the sanction of very recent authority. The quotation is taken from "The Lives," etc., alluded to in a preceding part of this little work.*

It refers to St. Veronica, who was canonized so recently as 1839. On this subject Cardinal Wiseman says:—"*This spiritual union with certain devout souls* God has been pleased to make manifest to them by more sensible signs, *accompanied by formalities like those used in ordinary marriages.* Of such we read in the life of the ecstatic St. Catharine of Sienna. To this exalted dignity God was pleased to exalt Veronica, as He revealed to her during the crowning with thorns, of which we have already spoken. But He prepared her for it by several visions, of which we will

* "Lives of St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Francis de Girolamo, St. John Joseph of the Cross, St. Pacificus of San Severino, and St. Veronica Giuliani." Edited by N. Wiseman, etc., and published in 1846.

allow herself to speak.—'While I was one morning at Mass, suddenly an *application* came upon me. During the course of it I felt certain *touches in my heart*, which excited me to a strong desire of uniting myself wholly to God. On a sudden, it seems to me that God took me out of my senses, and by communication, gave me to know, *ab intra*, that He wished to be *espoused to me*. This news made my heart to leap anew, and I felt it burning within me!' . . . . She adds, that *in inviting her to his marriage*, Jesus frequently appeared in the form of a beautiful infant; and on the Feast of the Circumcision, 1694, intimated to her that her preparation for it was to be by all kinds of sufferings. . . . . On the 27th of that month [March], our Lord comforted her by showing her with what delight He looked upon a beautiful jewel, fixed in the wound of his sacred side, and telling her that *it had been formed of all the sufferings that she had undergone for his sake*. She offered herself anew to be crucified with Him, and He seemed to stoop down and embrace her soul, *giving it a kiss of love*. . . . . Two days previous, our Blessed Lady was pleased to prepare her for *her espousals*. This was by an intellectual vision, as she calls such in her writings, wherein she beheld the great Queen of Angels upon a magnificent

throne, accompanied by St. Catharine of Sienna, and St. Rose of Lima. To their prayer that she would consent to the espousals of her servant with her Divine Son, our Lady sweetly replied, that they should be brought about. Veronica saw in her hands a *beautiful ring*, intended, she was told, for her. . . . . On Holy Saturday our Lord appeared to her, and, showing her *the nuptial ring, invited her to his marriage on the following day.* . . As she approached the altar, she heard the angels singing, in sweetest melody, *Veni Sponsa Christi;* then, being rapt out of her senses, she beheld two magnificent thrones; that on the right hand, of gold, decorated with the most splendid jewels, whereupon was seated our blessed Lord, with his wounds shining brighter than the sun; the other, formed of alabaster of purest whiteness, and brilliant with gems, and thereon was seated our blessed Lady, in a white mantle of surpassing richness, who besought her Son *to hasten his marriage.*

"Innumerable were the multitudes of the heavenly court, in the midst whereof were the holy virgins, St. Catharine and St Rose, the former of whom intimated to Veronica what she was to do in that most august solemnity. They conducted her slowly to the thrones, and at the foot

thereof put upon her, over her religious habit, various robes, each surpassing the other in splendour. As she approached the throne of Christ, whose garments she knows not, she says, how to describe, she beheld in each of his wounds a beautiful gem; but from that in his side, which was open, rays more bright than the sun darted on every side. In it she seemed to perceive *the nuptial ring*. When He raised up his hand to bless her, He entoned the words *Veni Sponsa Christi;* and our Lady, with the whole court, taking them up, continued, *Accipe coronam, quam tibi Dominus præparavit in æternum.* St. Catharine then took off her rich attire, leaving *only her religious habit*, to show, the saint intimates, *its value in the eyes of God, being allowed to appear in that glorious assembly.* After remaining in this dress for a short time, our Lord made a sign to his blessed mother, to clothe her with *the nuptial garment.* It was a magnificent mantle, covered with gems, and appeared of different colours. Our Lady gave it to St. Catharine, who put it upon Veronica, and placed her between the two thrones. Then, feeling herself more than ever *pierced with love*, she saw our Lord take the ring out of his side, and give it to his mother. 'This ring,' she writes, 'shone with splendour. It appeared to

me to be made of gold, but all wrought in enamel, which formed in the stone a name of the good Jesus. . . . . From that time I gave *looks of love* towards my Lord, and seemed to address Him, *urging Him to the espousals.*' The heavenly Queen commanded her to stretch out her hand to St. Catharine, which Jesus took, 'and at that moment,' she writes, 'I felt myself united more closely than ever with Him. Together with Mary ever blessed, He *placed the ring upon my finger*, and then blessed it.' In that instant, heaven again resounded with the songs of the angelic choir, after which her *Divine Spouse* gave her new rules. . . . *He told her He would be entirely hers.*

"Thus ended this mystic ceremony of her espousals. . . . . She adds, that nearly at every communion, *the same marriage was renewed*; *and that the ring remained upon her finger* (!!!!). Sister Mary Spaciani attests that she *saw it once distinctly with her own eyes* (!!)"

"In the processes* two other rings are mentioned as *having been given to her at the espousals, and the renewals of them.* . . . . Likewise another, which was enriched . . . . with three gems."

Again, observe the following teaching on the

* The formal official acts upon which the Bull of Canonization was made out.

conventual paradise. It is taken from "The Nun Sanctified," by St. Alphonsus Liguori, the work before alluded to.

"But this paradise [that of visiting the Holy Sacrament] *religieuses* can enjoy in a special manner. It is true that Jesus remains in the holy sacrament for all; but He remains particularly for nuns—his spouses, *who enjoy his society day and night within their very own house.* . . . .

"To visit Jesus Christ, seculars must leave their houses and go to the church, which is closed at night, and in many places open only in the morning. But a nun need not leave her own dwelling in order to enjoy the society of Jesus Christ. *He remains continually in the home in which she dwells.*

"A nun, then, can visit Him whenever she pleases, in the morning or evening, by day or by night. She, *as a spouse, is permitted to dwell in the palace.* How highly honoured does the vassal esteem himself to be, when he is invited to dwell in the palace of the king! You then, O blessed sister, are one of those happy Christians, who have the honour of *dwelling on this earth with Jesus Christ the king of heaven.* You can visit Him, and remain with Him day and night, whenever you please. . . . . In other churches Jesus

Christ remains for all; but *in your monastery He dwells only for you and your companions.*"

Such seed as this, freely cast into the productive soil of simplicity and enthusiasm, cannot fail to bring forth a plenteous harvest in due season.

Lest however it should be pleaded that the experience of St. Veronica was extraordinary, and can therefore hardly be taken as furnishing a fair specimen of the *doctrine* of the church on the subject, let me solicit a careful perusal of the following extracts from the form for the consecration of nuns. They are taken from the highest Roman Catholic authority, the "Pontificale Romanum."*

We pass over much prefatory matter, all having a tendency to illustrate our point; as also *much* that for the sake of *propriety* and *delicacy* it would be impossible to quote in a work like this, and come to the concluding part of the profane service.

The veil, the marriage ring, and the torque or necklace, having been hallowed by the officiating Pontiff, and the preface ended, he, having put on his mitre, takes his seat. The virgins rise, and having knelt lowly before the Pontiff, and again vowed to persevere in their purpose, the Pontiff puts the

* Mechlin edition, 1845.

veil over the head, saying, "*Accipe velamen sacrum, etc.*" "Receive thou the sacred veil, whereby thou mayest be known to have contemned the world, and lowly and humbly, with the whole endeavour of thy heart, to have subjected thyself *as a wife to Jesus Christ for ever!* who defend thee from all evil, and bring thee to life eternal. Amen."

Being veiled, and continuing on their knees, they sing,

"Posuit signum in faciem meam, ut nullum præter eum amatorem admittam."

"He hath set his seal upon my forehead that I should *admit no lover but Him.*"

After which he calls them, chanting—"Desponsari, dilecta, veni, etc." "Come, my beloved, *to be wedded;* the winter is past, the turtle is singing, and the flourishing vines give smell."

Here the virgins are again presented to the Pontiff. Then, taking the ring in his right hand, and the virgin's right hand in his left, and putting the ring on the ring-finger of her right hand, he espouses the same to Jesus Christ ("Desponsat illas Jesu Christo"), saying to each—

"*I espouse thee to Jesus Christ, the Son of the Supreme Father*, who keep thee undefiled (illæsam). Therefore receive the ring of faith, the seal of the

Holy Ghost; so that thou be called *the Spouse of God*, and if thou serve Him faithfully, be crowned everlastingly. In nomine Pa-+tris, et Fi-+lii, et Spiritûs + Sancti. Amen."

This done, still kneeling, they sing—

"Ipsi sum desponsata cui angeli serviunt, cujus pulchritudinem sol et luna mirantur."

"I am espoused to Him whom angels serve, and at whose beauty the sun and moon do marvel."

Being now wedded, kneeling on their knees, they lift up their right hands on high, and show them, singing—

"Annulo suo subarrhavit me Dominus meus Jesus Christus, et tamquam sponsam decoravit me coronâ."

"*With his own ring hath wedded me my Lord Jesus Christ, and hath adorned me with a crown as his spouse.*"

Then the Pontiff rising, his mitre on, and standing with his face towards them, says, "God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, who hath vouchsafed to choose you to an *espousalship* like that of the Blessed Mary (ad beatæ Mariæ matris Domini nostri J. C. *consortium*) mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, hallow you, that in the presence of God and his angels you may preserve untouched and undefiled the virginity you

have professed, and hold on your purpose, love chastity, and keep patience; that you may *merit to receive the crown of virginity*. Through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Next follows the ceremony of crowning, which anciently in the Western, as it still is in the Eastern Churches, was as essential a part of the marriage ceremony as the putting on of the ring. After this, the virgins rising, chant together the antiphon:—"Ecce quod concupivi, jam video; quod speravi, jam teneo; illi sum juncta in cœlis, quem in terris posita totâ devotione dilexi."

"Lo, what I longed for, I now enjoy; what I have hoped for I now hold; I am joined in heaven to Him whom I have loved while on earth with my whole devotion."

Then the Pontiff, joining his hands before his breast, pronounces over the virgins standing, but lowly bending their heads, two successive benedictions. From even the extracts given from these we forbear to quote, out of respect to the motives before alleged, concluding with the closing exhortation of the Pontiff to the Abbess at the termination of the ceremony:—

"Take care how thou keepest these virgins, who are consecrated to God; and that thou again present them to Him *immaculate*, as thou shalt

render an account for them before the tribunal *of their husband*, the Judge that is to come."*

Can words be plainer than these, or meaning more self-evident? It is in vain to attempt to mystify or explain away this doctrine, for out of its own mouth is the Roman Church condemned.

But what shall we say of the condition of those who are ensnared by this specious delusion? In what a maze of hopeless error are they forthwith involved. Their feet have indeed stumbled on the dark mountains, and if a miracle snatch them not from destruction, they will stumble on, until they fall headlong into the abyss, and are eternally engulphed. How unsubstantial and deceptive such pretensions are, I have endeavoured feebly to illustrate in the foregoing pages.

But I may add that, in the whole of the inspired revelation given by God to man, there is not written one word, either directly or indirectly, authorizing them, or in the remotest degree countenancing irrevocable vows of virginity and perpetual seclusion from the world. They are like the other machinery of the Church of Rome, only a gilded bait to decoy the unwary; and like her other

* "Pontificale Romanum. Pars Prima. De Benedictione et Consecratione Virginum." Mechlin, 1845. Foye's "Romish Rites, Offices, and Legends." London, 1839.

unauthorized assumptions, eternity alone will reveal their true character.

My fellow-traveller to eternity, there is an hour swiftly coming which must sift every pretension—which must scatter every delusion, and reveal every unscriptural hiding-place.

Where, then, shall she appear, who is risking the salvation of her precious undying soul upon the truth of figments so baseless and chimerical? Oh, if she has not on the wedding garment of the Saviour's pure and perfect righteousness—if she is not trusting to his finished work alone—where will be the hope of the trembling, unclothed spirit, as it goes forth to meet its Judge?

Gladly do we leave the veil where God Himself has placed it, and thankfully commit the issue to Him to whom the secrets of all hearts are manifest, and who judgeth righteous judgment. But this we know, because his own Word hath said it: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." * All, therefore, who build upon any other, however fair the edifice may *seem*, will prove too late, in the coming flood of death and judgment, that it will be swept away by the hand of omnipotence, with an unsparing and irrevocable destruction.

* 1 Cor. iii. 11.

That the Divine Spirit may bring home the subject to the heart of every tamperer with Romanistic and conventual error, is my sincere and heartfelt prayer.

"This is no heaven!
And yet they told me that all heaven was here,
This life the foretaste of a life more dear;
That all beyond this convent cell
Was but a fairer hell;
That all was ecstacy and song within,
That all without was tempest, gloom, and sin.
Ah me, it is not so,
This is no heaven, I know!

"This is not rest!
And yet they told me that all rest was here;
Within these walls the med'cine and the cheer
For broken hearts; that all without
Was trembling, weariness, and doubt;
This the sure ark which floats above the wave,
Strong in life's flood to shelter and to save;
This the still mountain lake,
Which winds can never shake.
Ah me, it is not so,
This is not rest, I know!

"This is not light!
And yet they told me that all light was here,—
Light of the holier sphere;
That through this lattice seen,
Clearer and more serene,
The clear stars ever shone,
Shining for me alone;

And the bright moon more bright,
Seen, in the lone blue night,
By ever-watchful eyes,
The sun of convent skies.
Ah me, it is not so,
This is not light, I know!

"This is not love!
And yet they told me that all love was here,
Sweetening the silent atmosphere;
All green, without a faded leaf,
All smooth, without a fret, or cross, or grief;
Fresh as young May,
Yet calm as autumn's softest day.
No balm like convent air,
No hues of paradise so fair!
A jealous, peevish, hating world beyond,
Within, love's loveliest bond;
Envy and discord in the haunts of men,
Here, Eden's harmony again.
Ah me, it is not so,
Here is no love, I know!

"This is not home!
And yet for this I left my girlhood's bower,
Shook the fresh dew from April's budding flower,
Cut off my golden hair,
Forsook the dear and fair,
And fled, as from a serpent's eyes,
Home and its holiest charities;
Instead of all things beautiful,
Took this decaying skull,
Hour after hour to feed my eye,
As if foul gaze like this could purify;

Broke the sweet ties that God had given,
And sought to win his heaven,
By leaving home-work all undone,
The home-race all unrun,
The fair home-garden all untill'd,
The home affections all unfill'd;
As if these common rounds of work and love
Were drags to one whose spirit soared above
Life's tame and easy circle, and who fain
Would earn her crown by self-sought toil and pain;
Led captive by a mystic power,
Dazzled by visions in the moody hour,
When sick of earth, and self, and vanity,
I longed to be alone or die;
Mocked by my own self-brooding heart,
And plied with every wile and art,
That could seduce a young and yearning soul
To start for some mysterious goal,
And seek in cell and savage waste
The cure of blighted hope, and love misplaced.

* * * * *

Yet 'tis not the hard bed, nor lattice small,
Nor the dull damp of this cold convent wall;
'Tis not the frost on these thick prison bars,
Nor the keen shiver of these wintry stars;
Not this coarse raiment, nor this coarser food,
Nor bloodless lip of withering womanhood;—
'Tis not all these that make me sigh and fret,
'Tis something deeper yet,—
The unutterable void within,
The dark, fierce warfare with this heart of sin,
The inner bondage, fever, storm, and woe,
The hopeless conflict with the hellish foe,
'Gainst whom this grated lattice is no shield,
To whom this cell is victory's chosen field.

* * * * *

Here is no balm
For stricken hearts; no calm
For fevered souls; no cure
For minds diseased. The impure
Becomes impurer in this stagnant air;
My cell becomes my tempter and my snare,
And vainer dreams than ere I dreamed before
Crowd in at its low door.
And have I fled, my God, from Thee,
From thy glad love and liberty;
And left the road where blessings fall like light,
For self-made by-paths, shaded o'er with night?
Oh! lead me back, my God,
To the forsaken road,
Life's common beat, that there,
Even in the midst of toil and care,
I may find Thee,
And in thy love be free!"

H. Bonar.

THE END.

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